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Multikulturalismus v Indii: Selhání politiky diference

Multiculturalism in India: A Failure of the Politics of Difference

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Abstrakt

Během 70 let od získání nezávislosti Indie neustále řeší dvojitý problém: na jedné straně stojí potřeba zajistit spravedlivou společnost stojící na základech kulturní a náboženské diverzity. Na straně druhé je však nutné neustále hledat silnou jednotící myšlenku, která by byla s to udržet jednotnou politickou společnost bez rizika další fragmentace. Práce využívá komunitaristické filosofie Charlese Taylora a jeho rozdělení na politiku rovné důstojnosti a politiku diference coby základního konceptuálního rámce pro dosažení tří různých cílů. Zaprvé prokázat, že afirmativní přístup k uznání menšin v indickém případě nevede ke stabilitě. Zadruhé rehabilitovat néhrúovský sekularismus jako životaschopnou státní ideologii nezávislé Indie. A zatřetí interpretovat indický politický diskurs na úrovni politické praxe jako souboj o hegemonii mezi elitami a buržoazií ve smyslu teorie Antonia Gramsciho. Vzestup politiky identit a hinduistického nacionalismu je tak chápán nikoli jako výsledek selhání indického sekularismu jako takového, ale spíš jako jeho neúčinné aplikace a následné krize legitimity.

Klíčová slova:

Indie; multikulturalismus; politika diference; sekularismus; antimodernismus; hinduistický nacionalismus; hegemonie; pasivní revoluce

Abstract

For the 70 years since Independence, India has been facing a two-fold problem: on the one hand, there is a strong need of a just society on the basis of cultural and religious diversity. On the other hand, however, there is a strong urge to find an overarching unifying idea which could keep the polity together without any risk of further fragmentation. Taking the communitarian philosophy of Charles Taylor and his distinction between the *politics of equal dignity* and *politics of difference* as the basic conceptual framework, the thesis pursues three different objectives. First, to prove that affirmative approach towards recognition of minorities does not provide stability in the Indian case. Second, to rehabilitate the Nehruvian secularism as a viable state ideology of independent India. And third, to interpret the Indian political discourse on the level of political practice as a struggle for hegemony between the elites and bourgeoisie in the Gramscian sense. The rise of identity politics and Hindu nationalism is thus perceived not as an outcome of the failure of the Indian secularism as such, but rather of its ineffective application and subsequent crisis of legitimacy.

Keywords:

India; multiculturalism; politics of difference; secularism; anti-modernism; Hindu nationalism; hegemony; passive revolution

Contents

Introduction

Among the theorists and proponents of multiculturalism, India is often perceived as one of the countries where the politics based on cultural diversity contributes to a relatively peaceful coexistence of an ethnically and religiously fragmented nation. From the multiculturalist perspective, India is seen as one of the few postcolonial states in Asia that, after achieving independence, embarked on a multicultural path, acknowledged rights of minorities and valued cultural diversity. Multicultural policy is perceived as a safeguard both against cultural assimilation and pressure of Hindu nationalist forces whose ultimate goal has been to define India as an ethnonationalist state.[1] The Indian Constitution from 1950 provides minority rights for a wide range of groups, particularly religious, linguistic, and tribal, and these policies have been even deepened since Independence.[2]

When creating the new independent state, the Indian leaders had basically three options on the table: The first option was to root the national ideology in the culture of the majority, mirroring the neighbouring Pakistan. The second was to emulate the classical liberal model of the state and provide the citizens with individual rights irrespective of their group identities. However, India has chosen the third path which acknowledged its people not only as individual citizens, but also as members of particular cultural communities.

The argument of the proponents of multiculturalism, however, is partly misleaded. Firstly, it inadvertently mingles the Western idea of multiculturalism with the Indian notion of "unity in diversity". Secondly, it ahistorically ignores the fact that the Indian concept preceded the Western multicultural philosophy which is thus confined to the role of a mere observer. And thirdly, ahistorically again, it does not take into account the rift between the definitions embedded in Indian laws and different approaches of different governments towards particular communities.

The Indian system of protection of religious freedoms is quite complex and although it may look as a multicultural paradise, it is necessary to distinguish between its theory and practice. Although we can find some elements of a multicultural framework in the Indian Constitution, such as rights to establish and manage their own institutions given to communities, one should also follow the section on Directive Principles, which in fact designed some of the provisions, such as separate personal laws for religious communities or reservations for the marginalized sections of society, to be adopted only as temporary.

[1] Kymlicka, Will, He, Baogang (ed.): *Multiculturalism in Asia*. 2005, p. 20.
[2] Mahajan, Gurpreet: Indian Exceptionalism or Indian Model: Negotiating Cultural Diversity and Minority Rights in a Democratic Nation-State. In Kymlicka, Will, He, Baogang (eds.): *Multiculturalism in Asia*. 2005, pp. 288–289.

The problem which India faces is two-fold: on the one hand, there is a strong need of a just society on the basis of cultural and religious diversity. On the other hand, however, there is a strong urge to find an overarching unifying idea which could keep the polity together without any risk of further fragmentation. In my view, however, the politics of identity has little to contribute to the Indian debate about justice between various social groups. The reason is that the Indian case of treating injustice does not reflect the dilemma between redistribution and recognition,[3] but rather between 'affirmative' and 'transformative' remedies for injustice.[4] While the transformative redistribution and recognition aim at restructuring the underlying framework that generates inequitable outcomes, the affirmative remedies operate within the framework and do not disturb it. In India, the affirmative approach was adopted to such an extent that even the members of marginalized groups such as so-called Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes do not want to change the system as such and aim at securing as many benefits as possible within the system.

Objectives

The aim of my thesis is three-fold. First, I would like to show that affirmative approach towards recognition of minorities does not provide stability and only leads to further fragmentation of the Indian polity. In my analysis, I will focus namely on the issues of recognition of the religious and social minorities – Muslim personal law and reservation for Other Backward Classes in particular. On the other hand, I will not cover in detail the issue of Scheduled Castes and Tribes or the issues of linguistic policy. Analyzing a few historical events and selected documents from the Indian past, I will try to show how the decline of strong secular values undermined the coherence of the Indian polity. In a broader sense, I will attempt to present that the unifying element of the Indian federation lies not in acknowledging its citizens as members of cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic groups, but rather in developing a strong pan-Indian identity based on a difference-blind approach promoting the individual rights. On the contrary, further efforts to recognize and evaluate other minority groups lead to a further fragmentation of the society. Just to make sure, I am no onthological individualist and I do not believe that society consist only of aggregation of atomized individuals. For the purpose of this work, however, a certain level of individualist approach is necessary.

The antagonistic relation between the individualistic and holistic approaches opens another question which I am aware of, but I will not deal with. As Partha Chatterjee has argued, the

[3] Fraser, Nancy, Honneth, Axel: *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. 2003.
[4] Fraser, Nancy: From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age, *New Left Review*, No. I/212 (July–August 1995), pp. 68–93.

British colonizers promoted the view of a fragmented society consisting of heterogeneous communities in order to legitimize the British Raj as the sole power capable to unite and rule the territory of India. On the other hand, however, it provided the incentive for the Indian nationalist elite to develop the pan-Indian unity in order to oppose the British rule.[5] In the mirroring view of the Indian nationalists, all structural inequalities were perceived as a consequence of colonialism, and the impression that all the disparities will vanish together with the colonial rule was quite common. Could not be the multiculturalist perception only echoing the colonial confidence that India is composed of incoherent communities and polities, only evaluating the differences as a positive feature?

Second, I would like to rehabilitate the Nehruvian secularism as a viable state ideology of independent India. This does not mean a critique of plurality within the society: it is welcome on the level of community, but when considering a federation of 29 states, one must take into account also an idea which can bridge and tie together all its multiple pluralities. Although secularism indeed has its own flaws and weaknesses, it still has its say in the debates on the multicultural cohabitation as an ideology which is able to maintain a good compromise between social justice and national cohesion. On the other hand, the affirmative approach does not succeed in resolving the problem either of inequality or difference, as it only reinforces the differences between groups.[6] As a matter of fact, it only creates feelings of betrayal within the privileged sections of society and leaves the door open to the elite majoritarian backlash in the form of right-wing populism.[7] At the same time it is important to mention that as one the strongest critiques of Indian secularism revolves around the argument that secularism as an imported idea is alien to the Indian polity, a similar reprehension can be related also to multiculturalism. Both of them are originally Western ideas which draw on the tradition of Western liberalism and can be considered as a Western imposition.

Another reason why to deal with the Indian version of secularism instead the Western notion of multiculturalism as a *modus vivendi* between various social groups is the very nature of the Indian public discourse. The dominant trait in Indian politics has not been the equality and justice between its various social groups, but rather finding the overarching and unifying national idea which would all of these groups (or at least a great majority of them) internalize. This is also one of the reasons why there has been virtually no debate about multiculturalism

[5] Chatterjee, Partha: *The Nation and Its Fragments*. 1994.
[6] Fraser, Nancy: From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age, *New Left Review*, No. I/212 (July–August 1995), pp. 68–93.
[7] Desai, Radhika: Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34 (1999), No. 12, pp. 696–697.

in the Indian society and it was replaced by the debate about secularism as a state ideology which is supposed to overarch the just society.

Third, I would like to show that the Indian discourse on minorities is profiled neither as a debate between liberalism with emphasis on strong individual rights and communitarism promoting collective identities,[8] nor between social demands of redistributon and cultural claims of recognition.[9] It is rather a never-ending struggle between different social groups, either for hegemony between the elites and bourgeoisie, or for social benefits between the groups at the bottom of the caste and class hierarchy. However, I do not share the opinion of the anti-modernists who hold that it was secularism who helped to create the conflict within the society which was not ready to adopt this modern concept. In my perception, it is the deviation from the original secular ideas which helped to create tensions in the society and made the Indian citizens feel primarily as members of their respective communities. In the end, I will suggest the interpretation of the triumph of Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist campaign not as an assault on the Indian multicultural values, but rather as filling of the space vacated by the Nehruvian secularism as an ideology of the Indian national state. The rise of identity politics and Hindu nationalism is thus perceived not as an outcome of the failure of the Indian secularism, but rather of its ineffective application.

Methodology

Concerning the methodology, I operate on three different levels: contextual, conceptual and temporal, and I try to focus on this distinction in the respective chapters. Firstly, I aim at separating the ideas of political theory (what *ought* to be) from the realm of practical politics (what really *is*). For example, the Constitution envisages the implementation of uniform civil code, which nevertheless never came into effect. By contrast, the official recognition of the Personal Laws of the four religious communities (Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsees) was in a sharp contrast with the secular ideology, as it might create inequalities within the religious groups. The obvious question arises here: was the respect of religious personal laws an attempt to protect diversity through cultural autonomy, or rather a surrender of the liberal elites to the pressure from the religious leaders? If the second was true, it would be no wonder that the enaction of the uniform civil code would mean an imposition of the Hindu majority personal code upon the minorities.

[8] Taylor, Charles: Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate. In: Rosenblum, Nancy L.: *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. 1989, pp. 159–182.
[9] Fraser, Nancy, Honneth, Axel: *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. 2003.

In this place, a further clarification of the used terminology shall be done. When mentioning multiculturalism, I do not use the term in the sense of a distinct political philosophy, as it has not been embedded in the Indian political practice or in the public debate. For the purpose of my work, the term is used in a purely descriptive sense as synonymous for ethnic or cultural pluralism as the political reality of independent India. In general, however, I aim at avoiding the term as much as possible with regard to his relative insignificance in the Indian intellectual debate. I will neither try to map the Western multicultural debate on the Indian reality, as this attempt would lead to further misunderstanding. Given the tremendous diversity of India, a certain level of equal respect to various cultures has been necessary throughout all its history, and the term multiculturalism could thus be even considered as a truism – especially when the constitutional provisions recognizing diversity were implemented more than 20 years before the very emergence of the multicultural philosophy. With regard to the magnitude of the country, the discussion should rather revolve around the question whether the public discourse in India does not overlap from multicultural to intercultural dialogue. The 29 states and seven union territories differ not only in terms of ethnicity or language, but also on the political level. It is not uncommon that the same social, religious or ethnic group support two completely different political parties, constituting thus another sub-group in the inherently multicultural polity. Similarly, when mentioning secularism, I usually mean it not in a principial sense as a separation of religious institutions from the state, but as a specifically Indian political ideology endorsing neutral treatment of all religious beliefs.

The theoretical basis of this thesis is two-fold. On the basic conceptual level, I largely draw from the communitarian philosophy of Charles Taylor and his distinction between the *politics of equal dignity* and *politics of difference*. The politics of equal dignity emerges with the decline of hierarchical societies and aristocratic honour. Based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect, it recognizes the universal capacities of all citizens. Politics of difference, on the other hand, asserts that difference-blind principles of the politics of equal dignity are themselves reflection of particular hegemonic cultures, and recognizes the unique identity of every single individual or group as distinct from everyone else. Both of the politics are overlapping, and the politics of difference even grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity. Nevertheless, they can be mixed together in different proportions in every polity, and can provide us with a good clue to distinguish between two different approaches to diversity of modern societies.[10] During the 70 years after Independence, India has gone through a transition from the Nehruvian ideas of equal dignity to the multicultural polity

[10] Taylor, Charles: The Politics of Recognition. In Taylor, Charles et al.: *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. 1994, pp. 25–74.

promoting difference. This deviation however led to the increased communal tension and violence between the religious groups, but also a growing consciousness of various caste groups. While the secularism endorsing the politics of equal dignity worked relatively well in India, the multicultural recognition of various groups according to the politics of difference leads to further fragmentation of the diverse society. The Western debate about redistribution and recognition will not be used here as a reference point, but rather only in comparable perspective, as I believe that the Indian discussion is rich enough to be covered alone. Despite the alleged poverty of Indian political theory,[11] I would generally like to borrow from the Western conceptions as little as possible and hence contribute to raising awareness about the Indian political discourse. My personal aim is to contribute to balance the asymmetry in the encounter between cultures,[12] where the Indian students work with texts of the Western authors, while few Western students draw on the works of the Indian theorists, or are even aware of them. This is quite peculiar as the local authors are supposed to be more aware of the reality of the Indian polity, and subsequently the Indian political thinking.

The examination of deflection of the Indian secularism from the original Nehruvian universalistic vision using the multicultural approach of Charles Taylor was attempted as an original focus of this work. However, during the course of time, substantive changes in the Indian politics occurred. Because of the change in the government, a set of new questions arose. With the unprecedented victory of the Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 general elections, the Indian public debate was completely redefined and a new question occured. Could not be the landslide victory of formerly ostracized BJP in the elections analysed in terms of the struggle for hegemony between the liberal and the conservative sections of Indian elites and middle classes? Thus, I was propelled to add a third part to my analysis.

The debate about rights of minorities appears to be only a part of a greater story. We must not see the political debate as something purely academic or theoretical. Every ideology or philosophy has its specific conditions of emergence, particular authors and proponents, and its own set of adherents. In this point, Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, in which the ruling class can manipulate the value system of the society, came very useful. Thus, I will try to use the distinction between different types of liberalism sketched out by Taylor, but interpret the public discussion rather from the Gramscian point of view as a debate between various groups with vested interests with the ultimate aim to gain control of the whole discourse. My aim here is not to write a political history of independent India, but

[11] Parekh, Bhikhu: The Poverty of Indian Political Theory. *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XIII (Autumn 1992), No. 3.
[12] Balagangadhara, S. N.: *Reconceptualizing India Studies. Delhi*: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 72–73.

rather show on several examples how the national ideology of the Indian state has changed during the time. And, as the social majority–minority framework was adopted unsystematically and its temporary character made it open to further deliberations and challenges, the historical approach seems to be justifiable. Finally, I would like to add that my work focuses primarily on the political practice and its implications in political theory, not vice versa, as I hold the opinion that the theoretical analysis must follow only after the analysis of the practical knowledge and experience.

Structure of the thesis

Let me now structure the thesis according to the objectives and methodology mentioned above. In the **first chapter**, I will try to briefly explain the processes of how the very idea of India as a distinct polity was invented and further clarify my vantage point. In my view, we must resist the temptation to read the emergence of the new nation-state in 1947 not as a sheer adoption of the colonial framework imposed by the Western administrators and properly evaluate the self-identification of the inhabitants of Indian subcontinent with their territory. Similarly, I would like to challenge the widespread consciousness about the Indian political thought as a derivative discourse and show that a distinct liberal stream was present in the Indian political philosophy at least since the times of Ram Mohan Roy, creating conditions for a specific Indian nationalism at the end of 19th century.

In the **second chapter**, I will sketch out the three distinct approaches to the definition of emerging Indian nation, which in the same time represented three different sections of the society in quest for ideological hegemony in the projected independent state. Gandhian spiritual radicalism, as the first one of them, was inspired by the indigenous mythology, philosophy and folk traditions, rejecting thus the very notion of modern nation and civil society, and finding the defining principle of Indian nation in communitarian and religious values. The vision of the political heir of Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, was of a completely different make. According to this largely modernist idea, the Indian nation was still to be awakened after adopting the modern values of secularism, humanism and rationalism and embarking the project of common development. I will also show that the Gandhian and Nehruvian approach are not in mutual antagonism, but rather should be seen as two complementary approaches to the nation and society. The third conception of Indian nation, impersonalized by V. D. Savarkar, combines somehow both the notion of modern nationalism and primordial sentiments. Largely drawing from the Western concept of ethnic nationalism, Savarkar finds the unifying trait of Indian nation in its geographical unity, racial origin, and a common culture, from which he forms the ideology of *Hindutva* or Hindu nationalism.

In **chapter three**, we will focus on the conditions and process of creating the Indian constitution and the majority–minority framework it endorsed. I will show how the rights of communities based on religion, language, caste, and tribe were recognized in order to reach the equality of all citizens, but also the supposed provisionalness of some of them, creating thus the specific blend of politics of equal dignity and politics of difference. I will also delineate the two different approaches towards the ideology of secularism: the first one emphasizing neutrality between religions, and the second one focusing on prohibition of religious associations in state activities, and introduce the specific Indian variety of secularism. Finally, I will evaluate the specific role of the Indian National Congress as the biggest and oldest Indian political party, which for a considerable period of time substituted almost the whole political spectrum of the emerging republic. As the Nehruvian state promoted the social and democratic principles on which there was a broad consensus, the dissenting voices could achieve greater influence on the public deliberation from within the Congress party rather than from outside.

The **fourth chapter** is largely historical. By analysing the critical political events of the 1970s and 1980s, we will show the political consensus of the "Congress system" was dismantled, how the prevalent emphasis on religious and cultural identities contributed also to the growing communal tensions, and how the politics of recognition gradually degenerated into sheer populism of the ruling Congress elite in order to secure electoral support from the marginalized sections of society. Because of the reluctance of the Congress government to reform the personal laws of the religious communities, cultural rights started to be protected before the equal rights of the people within the religious communities and the individuals were gradually neglected, such as in the infamous case of Shah Bano. This opportunist approach of the ruling elites however eroded the very legitimacy of the government, giving a new lease of life to the dissenting voices, particularly from the conservative sections of the society.

In **chapter five**, we will analyze the so-called anti-modernist or alternative science movement as the first powerful and consistent critique of the Nehruvian secularism. Growing from the specific conditions of the 1970s which reformulated the definitions of Indian "national philosophy", the anti-modernist reject the secular approach to politics as a part of a broader modernist outlook, which is not only alien to the Indian society, but also inherently violent, and aim at rehabilitating Mahatma Gandhi as a proponent of alternative modernity. Interestingly enough, the fault-lines in Indian politics that gave birth to the indigenist tendencies among the anti-modernists and in other new social movements, also gave a new boost to the Hindu nationalists on the right.

In **chapter six**, we will follow the rise of the Hindu nationalism as a phenomenon complementary to the decline of secularism. Despite their antagonistic relation, Hindu nationalism should not be perceived as a form of religious fundamentalism or a rejection of anything Western. Quite the contrary, it can be seen as an attempt to gain recognition by the West through assertion of cultural difference.[13] Although the anti-modernists criticize both secularism and Hindu nationalism are the two sides of the same coin, as they both arise from the modernist conception of society and state, the relation between these three positions is more complicated. By challenging the scientific and rational approach to the world, the anti-modernists indirectly support the Hindu nationalist movement by reinforcing the traditional, irrationalist and Brahmanical identity of the Indian elites at the expense of formerly shared secular consensus.

As we have mentioned in the introduction, the Indian approach to recognition has been affirmative, not transformative. This holds true also in the case of reservation in public sector. In **chapter seven**, we will therefore analyse the implications of the Mandal Commission report on the Indian approach to affirmative action. We will it concentrate primarily on the methodological issues of identifying backwardness on the caste basis, which led to further reinforcement of identity politics based on primordial sentiments, as the members of the economically backward classes started to self-identify themselves with their primordial group. The large proportion of the backward classes in the population also contributed to the creation of the new "backward" identity of the lower castes, their politicization and formation of the strong electoral caste blocs. On the other hand, as the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations reinforced the system of reservations, many Indians from the higher castes started to believe that the system is anti-democratic and violating their own rights. This led to the re-emergence of the conflict between the necessity to preserve individual rights, and the imperative of defending the social welfare of the marginalized through group rights. The final effect of the "Mandalization" of Indian politics is thus ambiguous. On the one hand, it provided social justice to the weaker section of the society and led to the growing political consciousness among the marginalized, but on the other hand it contributed to further fragmentation of Indian polity and stripped the politics of any residue of ideology.

In **chapter eight**, we will show the failure of the identity politics executed by the Indian state on the very infamous example of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The controversy between the Hindu and Muslim community in the matter of a medieval mosque, which was allegedly erected on the birthplace of the mythical king Rama, remained a regional quarrel until the end

[13] Hansen, Thomas Blom: *The Saffron Wave*. 1999, p. 12.

mid-1980s when it was politicized by the Hindu nationalist organizations and appropriated by the ruling Congress party in its populist pursuit to woo the Hindu vote. The situation around the mosque escalated so much that it was demolished by the Hindu mobs in December 1992. The demand of the Hindu nationalist organizations to rebuild the Rama temple on the disputed spot has not been fulfilled yet. After several years of litigation, however, the Allahabad High Court decided to divide the land into three equal parts among the three parties to the dispute. Nevertheless, this verdict is largely problematic, as a property dispute was decided not on the basis of historical evidence, but rather on the basis of religious faith and belief, relocating thus the argument from secular domain to the epistemologically diferent domain of the sacred – or rather exploited by the Hindu populists.

In **chapter nine**, I will analyse the deep systemic changes in the Indian society which coincided with the fall of the Soviet Bloc in early 1990s. Opening up of formerly state-controlled sectors to private capital has led to transformation of the framework of class dominance, replacing the earlier dominance of a few "monopoly" houses by a broader capitalist class. This dynamics, accompanied with emancipation of the backward classes and castes, altered the relation between the domains of civil and political societies in India. On the other hand, we can trace a sort of a distinctive class culture among the urban middle classes, with an anti-corruption emphasis and seemingly paradoxical alliance between economic neoliberalism and religious and cultural nationalism, articulated in later years in the electoral successes of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. With regards to these conditions, can we revive the Gramscian concept of passive revolution, scrapped by Sudipta Kaviraj in his classic essay almost thirty years ago?

In the **last chapter**, I will analyse the effect of the 2014 general elections which could have possibly marked a new milestone in the Indian politics. I will try to explain the electoral victory of the BJP in terms of a substantial change in the struggle for hegemony over the Indian society and political discourse, where the Hindu majoritarianism is gaining upper hand. I will try to show how the unprecedent triumph of Narendra Modi is not to be perceived as a usual alternation in power, but rather as filling of the space vacated by the weakened Nehruvian secularism, which is attempted to be replaced by the integral humanism of Deendayal Upadhyay as the designated new national ideology.

In the end, I will present the findings of my research, formulate the conclusion and evaluate both the historical role of the Indian secularism and its approach towards the politics of equal dignity and politics of difference both on theoretical and practical level. Finally, I will try to sketch out what are the possible and feasible alternatives to the Indian version of secularism

and its prospects towards Hindu majoritarianism. I hope that my work will contribute to better understanding of the mutual influence of Indian political theory and practice since Independence.

1. The invention of India

Before the 19th century, no resident of the Indian subcontinent would identify himself as an Indian. As the British Indian civil servant John Strachey pointed out, "there is not, and never was an India, nor ever any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious; no Indian nation, and especially no 'people of India' of which we hear so much".[14] Before the British subjugation of India, there were several antagonistic kingdoms and princely states, myriad religion and belief systems, and a complex caste framework. The 1961 Census listed 1652 languages as mother tongues. To quote John Strachey again, "the differences between the countries of Europe are undoubtedly smaller than those between the countries of India. Scotland is more like Spain than Bengal is like the Punjab."[15] In such circumstances, the self-invention of the Indian national community was hardly possible.[16]

The situation changed during the 19th century, as the British managed to unite the whole Indian subcontinent. If contrasted with areas of the previous Indian states, the British Indian Empire could be compared only to the empire of Maurya Dynasty in the 3rd century BC with its peak in the rule of Ashoka the Great. The powerful British central government and developments in transport and communications facilitated not only the colonial administration of the huge territory, but also the interconnection between the various regions of India. Thus, the alien conquest and rule engendered amongst Indians a sense of political unity.

1. 1 India as a Western Construct?

The British part in the making of the Indian nation in the 19th century is so crucial that it is even confusing to talk about any kind of Indian nationalism in this time. Although there was a strong anti-British movement culminating with the Great Mutiny of 1857, "Indian nationalism" is a misleading shorthand phrase often confused with anti-colonialism. There were Marathi or Bengali nationalisms, but the pan-Indian identity was still weak. Even the name India is a foreign invention, first used by the Greeks in the 4th century BC to describe the region behind the river Indus.

On the other hand, it is too simple to see India as a pure fabrication of the foreigners. The Indian nation is a product of a longer historical process and even in the remote past there has

[14] Strachey, John: *India*. 2009 [1888], p. 5.
[15] Ibid., p. 2.
[16] This part is partly drawing from my paper "Building European Identity: India as a Model?" presented at the international conference "*European, National and Regional Identity*", Oradea, 24–26 March 2011.

always been a fundamental unity of India – "a unity of a common faith and culture".[17] The regions of pre-colonial India shared common cultural forms, derived from both Brahmanic and non-Brahminic traditions, whether tribal or Muslim. This civilizational bond extended well beyond the territorial borders of contemporary India: to Persia in the west and Indonesia in the east.[18] In the Brahmanic traditions, there was also a deep sense of the subcontinent's natural geographical frontiers. The holy land of the Hindus spread from the Himalayas in the north to the ocean in the south, and the important Hindu pilgrimage sites established by Adi Shankara are situated in the four corners of contemporary India: Dwarka in Gujarat in the west, Puri in Orissa in the east, Jyotirmath in Uttarakhand in the north and Sringeri in Karnataka the south. Despite the tendency to see India as an artificially created politiy consisting of a large number of linguistic, cultural and geographic zones, followers of different religions and speakers of numerous mother tongues, the founders of the independent India were able to further develop this sense of shared territory and traditions, and create a genuine Indian collective identity constructed on the basis of commonly held values and solidarity.[19]

1. 2 Indian political thought as a derivative discourse?

Similarly to the Indian nationalism, even the Indian political thinking is sometimes understood as a kind of "derivative discourse" which is subject to the hegemony of the Western concepts and constantly attempting to approximate the Western modernity.[20] However, contrary to the widespread belief that democracy is a purely Western idea and practice, there are many different traditions of public discussion and reasoning throughout the world, while India is one of the most prominent examples.[21] As for the liberal thinking, which was foundational to all forms of Indian nationalism and the country's modern politics, the situation is different, but not entirely: Indians indeed appropriated and exploited the Western liberal ideas in their quest for freedom, nevertheless they were able to transform them into a specifically Indian form of liberalism. In their debates, the question of personal liberties was the second most important one just after the question of independence.[22]

Citing K. M. Pannikar,[23] Rajeev Bhargava argues that there have long been at least two streams of distinctly Indian liberalism. The first stream, founded by Ram Mohan Roy,

[17] Nehru, Jawaharlal: Psychology of Indian Nationalism. 2007 [1927], pp. 95–106.
[18] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 155.
[19] Brubaker, Rogers, Cooper, Frederick: Beyond 'Identity', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29 (2000), No. 1, pp. 1–47.
[20] See Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse?* 1986.
[21] Sen, Amartya: Democracy and its Global Roots. *The New Republic*, October 6, 2003, pp. 28–35.
[22] Bayly, C. A.: *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. 2012, p. 11.
[23] K. M. Pannikar: *In Defence of Liberalism*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962.

emphasized the right of women and promoted the establishment of casteless society. The second stream included the likes of Keshab Chandra Sen, Mahadev Govind Ranade, and most importantly Swami Vivekananda, who focused on the reform of orthodox Hinduism from within by disassociating the illiberal practices such as caste or prohibition of widow remarriage from the Hindu religion.[24] The inclination towards liberal values among Indian intellectuals dates as far as into the time of Rammohan Roy's call for liberty of the press in 1823. Later, the reformists were influenced by and sympathetic to John Stuart Mill's emphasis on freedom of conscience, and found his call for freedom of religion useful in their struggle for curbing the influence of Hindu orthodoxy on the Indian public life. Similarly, Mill's distrust towards bureaucracy was resonating with the Indian nationalists in their defiance of centralized colonial power. At the same time, Indians refused the Western assumption that they were not eligible to the liberal principles because their civilization was inferior to the British one and thus they were to be directed and educated by the imperial authority.[25]

Infused by the selective use of ancient and medieval political philosophers, the Indian political thought was not only strong enough to show its own liberal tradition, but also to make modern concepts easier understandable for the Indian public.[26] Indian liberalism is different from the Western one, and analogically we must analyse the Indian multicultural politics as a specific set of ideas and practices. As Sunil Khilnani points out,[27] the Indian liberalism was historically far from being individualist. Among the early leaders of the Indian National Congress, liberty was understood not as an individual right of an isolated subject, but as a nation's collective right to self-determination.[28] At the end of the 19th century, individualism was not a common idea of the time, as the Indian society was largely community-based, with communities formed primarily by the *jatis* as basic units of self-identification. It is necessary to remember that the Indian political thinking as such is substantially conservative, with even the movements of the lower castes and untouchables being conservative and static and not revolutionary. Instead of reforming the society, political parties and movements such as the Bahujan Samaj Party seek to use the State power to revise the "historical evil" and provide justice and equality for the lowest strata of the society through new benefits from the State.[29]

[24] Bhargava, Rajeev: *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*. 2010, p. 12.
[25] Bayly, C. A.: *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. 2012, pp. 12–13.
[26] Bayly, C. A.: *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. 2012, p. 20.
[27] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 26
[28] Note that this holistic approach is present also in Gandhi's idea of swaraj, where the original meaning of "self-rule" is extended to "self-purification" and "self-reliance", and the freedom of an individual thus merges with the freedom of the Indian society (see Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909].)
[29] Pai, Sudha: *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution. The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002, p. 113.

1. 3 Nation against history?

As Sunil Khilnani argues, Indian democracy was neither an inheritance from India's indigenous past nor a gift of the British rule. It arose instead from the nationalist struggle against British imperialism and from the debates within the Independence movement.[30] However, although the leaders of the Indian nationalism were well aware both of the European and Indian tradition of political thinking, the very concept of the modern nation was imposed on the society "against the course of Indian history"[31]. Opposed to the vernacular traditions and notions of community present in Indian intellectual universe, the idea of nation became a permanent source of conflict in the Indian public debate, allowing multiple interpretations based on the various renditions of the obscured Indian past.

[30] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, pp. 1–6.
[31] Das, Veena: Critical Events. 1995, pp. 29–30.

2. Three concepts of Indian identity

As soon as in 1920s, the Indian nationalism has radicalised and gave birth to three distincts conceptions of the Indian nation. In the Hindu nationalist view, promoted by likes of V.D. Savarkar, Swami Shraddhanand or Lala Lajpat Rai, Indian unity should be found in the Hindu culture and religion for the obvious reason that the Hindus form the dominant majority in the country (about 70 per cent of the population, according to the British census). In the second vision, advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, religion was also perceived as a source of interconnection among Indians, but the society should be based on values common to all religion beliefs, such as nonviolence and tolerance. The last and ultimately winning conception was that of Jawaharlal Nehru, which discovered the basis for unity not in the religion, but in a shared historical past of cultural mixing, and a future project of common development. In this approach, India's immense cultural diversity was seen as a very principle of its identity, and the cultural synthesis should be understood as the "dominant trait of India's civilization and history".[32] Each of these three dominant nationalist conceptions represented a different section of the Indian society with their own distinct elites in their quest for cultural hegemony in the emerging state, and, as we will see, each of them gained their historical momentum in a different period of time.

2. 1 Spiritual radicalism of M. K. Gandhi

The first of the three concepts was the vision of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, which rose to prominence during the Independence movement. Inspired by the Indian (but essentially Hindu) mythology and philosophy and drawing on folk tradition, Gandhism was able to mobilize considerable masses on the basis of his spiritual radicalism and spread the idea of the Indian nation among the peasantry, and simultaneously provide the nationalist movement with an authentic organized support. As a leader of the frequent leader of the anti-colonial protests, Gandhi developed and popularized a true system of methods of civil disobedience, which was based on traditional Indian ethics and symbolics, and thus was able to capture the imagination of the common peasants. This can be seen for example in the Gandhian concept of *satyāgraha*, roughly translated as "insistence on truth" or "loyalty to the truth". Apart from the passive resistance, *satyāgraha* obviously required its followers to observe the principle of nonviolence or *ahimsa*.

The notion of India as a nation with an intrinsic strength embodied in its inherent serenity and ability to resolve all the conflicts in peaceful manner reappears in the Gandhian idea of the

[32] Nehru, Jawaharlal: Can Indians Get Together? 2007 [1942], pp. 43–48.

Indian state. In Gandhian perception, India was essentially a Hindu country, but this very adherence to Hinduism was comprehended as a basis of tolerance to other believers on the religious basis. Refusing to separate religion from politics, Gandhi understood the religion as the principal means of interconnection among Indians. Instead of an Indian unity based on common history, Gandhi turned to legends and stories from the popular religious traditions, including folk myths, Bhakti traditions, and also Christian morality to create his own version of patriotism and eclectic and pluralist version of morality drawing from different religious traditions.[33]

However, as Partha Chatterjee points out, there are only a few texts in Gandhi's work in which he reveals his ideas on state, society and nation systematically.[34] Although there were some attempts made by his followers and especially Gandhian anti-modernists to show Gandhi as a political philosopher,[35] his work is more of a kind of personal ethics with a strong emphasis on consistency between words and deeds, individual and society, and means and ends. This makes it especially difficult to follow it as an ideology of state or a code of conduct for a larger polity, and maybe also one of the reasons why it proved unsuccessful after the Independence.

Perhaps the most strenuous feature of all Gandhi's writings is his strong anti-modernism and scepticism to anything coming from the West. In his view, there is no need to adopt the Western model of modernization and industrialization, as Indian values are supposedly traditional, communitarian and religious.[36] In Gandhi's view, every kind of industrialization would inevitably lead to exploitation in the industrial cities and unemployment in the countryside. However, as Partha Chatterjee argues, Gandhi's critique of modern civilization does not stop with his condemnation of industrialism. In fact, it is a fundamental critique of the entire bourgeois society, its economic life based on individual property, its depersonalized laws of the free market, its political institutions of representative democracy, its spirit of innovation and belief in scientific progress, its rational and secular approach to philosophy, ethics, art and education.[37]

The critique of modern civilization in *Hind Swaraj* is based on the simple fact that Indian civilization was able to resist any kind of change. This very ahistoricity is an ultimate proof that it had found the true principles of social organization. According to Gandhi, the Indian

[33] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, pp. 164–165.
[34] Chatterjee, Partha: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society. In Guha, Ranajit (ed.): *Subaltern Studies III*. 1984, p. 156.
[35] On the anti-modernists, see Chapter 5.
[36] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind* Swaraj. 2014 [1909], p. 56–59.
[37] Chatterjee, Partha: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society. In Guha, Ranajit (ed.): *Subaltern Studies III*, pp. 162–163. See also Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind* Swaraj. 2014 [1909], pp. 27–30.

cultural values are communitarian, unmaterialistic and spiritual, and indifferent to the ideas of progress and development:

> "We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. (...) And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before."[38]

The ultimate goal of the Gandhian political thinking was the utopia of *Rāmarājya*, whose ruler, by his natural moral quality, always adhere to truth and expresses the collective will. The economic organization of production is arranged in a perfect four-fold *varṇa* system – so perfect that it allows a just system of division of labour without any differences in status and any trace of caste discrimination. The system of specialization and reciprocity assures that there is no unhealthy competition and no difference in status between the workers.[39]

While rejecting the historicism of other nationalist writers such as Ambedkar who explained the caste system as a result of historical abuse of the temporal power by the religious dignitaries,[40] Gandhi even did not share their confidence in rationality and scientific knowledge, preferring instinctive faith over scientific reasoning. In his view, truth does not lie in history; truth is a moral and transcendental category, achievable only in the experience of one's life.

A similar approach can be seen in Gandhi's interpretation of colonial subjugation. The reason for conquest of India was not that the Indians would lack the necessary technical or cultural attributes to resist the Western powers, but precisely the opposite: the Indians were not morally strong enough to resist the glitter of modern "civilization only in name".[41] And, finally, even the characteristic Gandhian anti-modernism is to be explained on moral grounds: the modern science and technology, cities and factories are not harmful primarily because they exploit the workers, plunder the natural resources or deprive the people of their

[38] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind* Swaraj. 2014 [1909], p. 57–58.
[39] Chatterjee, Partha: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society. In Guha, Ranajit (ed.): *Subaltern Studies III*, p. 165
[40] Cf. Ambedkar, B. R.: *Riddles in Hinduism: The Annotated Critical Selection*. 2016, pp. 105–128.
[41] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind* Swaraj. 2014 [1909], p. 30.

livelihoods, but because they make all the goods, services and places readily available, thus inciting impiety and consumerism in the people. This contamination of human spirit however eventually leads to the devastation of the material world: an immoderate person needs more resources to satisfy her needs than is her community able to produce.

Similarly, the British industrialism is interlinked with economic and political imperialism and is in a constant need of colonies suitable for exploitation. Desintegration of the inner value system thus inevitably ends in the breakdown of the country, nation and environment. Furthermore, Gandhi was well aware that the British model cannot be transposed to India with a 250-million population. Inspired by his favourite authors John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy (and unlike his third inspirational source, Henry David Thoreau), he saw the ideal of human coexistence in a self-sufficient village community with own natural and human resources. It is however necessary to add that Gandhi did not promote the existing Indian villages, but rather their ideal models which he wanted to rehabilitate as an alternative to the urban industrial civilization. Most interestingly, he regarded the caste system as a perfect division of labour to achieve this kind of harmony.

2. 1. 1 Gandhi and caste

The interpreation of Gandhi's approach to the caste system varies and there are basically two groups of scholarly work: the first group believes that Gandhi accepted the caste system as the "natural order of society". The second group believes that Gandhi's attitude evolved and changed over time. However, as Nishikant Kolge points out, both of these views concentrate only on Gandhi's writings or speeches without paying attention to his practices and personality.[42]

Gandhi, for example, showed disrespect towards the practice of untouchability from a very young age, not only on the basis of purity and pollution, but also concerning inter-dining and inter-caste marriage. Despite being a vegetarian from a Vaishnava sect, Gandhi was never offended by the fact that someone eats meat in his presence. Throughout his life, he used to eat with people of different faiths and castes, including untouchables, and strongly disregarded caste restrictions prescribing that one should eat only within their own caste:

> "We shall have to seek unity in diversity, and I decline to consider it a sin for a man not to drink or eat with any and everybody. These are disciplinary restraints which are not in themselves bad. Carried to ridiculous extremes, they may become harmful, and if the motive is one of arrogation of

[42] See Kolge, Nishikant: *Gandhi Against Caste*. 2017.

> superiority, the restraint becomes an indulgence, and therefore hurtful. But as time goes forward, and new necessities and occasions arise, the custom regarding inter-drinking, inter-dining, and inter-marrying, will require cautious modifications or rearrangement."[43]

While Gandhi's speeches and writings were often greatly conservative, he remained radical in his actions. This can be best illustrated on the example of the four ashrams which were founded by Gandhi in different times and different places. All of them attracted a heterogeneous group of followers from different castes and religions. Every settler was obliged to do daily manual work including cooking and gardening, but also cleaning and scavenging on a rotational basis. Although Gandhi praised the division of labour not only between the castes, but also between men and women as beneficial for the society, rules of cohabitation in his communities were an effective effort to break caste, community, and religious discrimination.

Although Gandhi advocated the caste system as a perfect division of labour, at the same time he promoted equal respect for every occupation without the idea of hereditary professions. His favour for system of hereditary occupations was propelled rather by his belief that industrialisation would gradually erode the traditional village economy without providing sustainable livelihoods for the Indian villagers,[44] but also destroy the traditional values and relations and create a society of alienated individuals.

While caste was defended, Gandhi rejected untouchability at the same time, rationalizing this approach by making a conceptual distinction between the two. While caste was seen as an integral part of Hindu life, untouchability was perceived as a sin going directly against the 'spirit of the Vedas' which represented "purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave".[45]

Despite his objections against untouchability, Gandhi was largely criticized by the Dalit leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. For him, Gandhi's approach towards untouchability was overly pathetic and paternalistic.[46] Instead of an instant abolishment of the caste system and keeping the four *varṇas*, as suggested by Gandhi, Ambedkar preffered first to gain for the Dalit community as many advantages as possible in order to compensate their social and economic backwardness. Gandhi, on the other hand, wneoliberalanted to get rid of

[43] Gandhi, M. K: *Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability*. 1964, p. 71.
[44] Chatterjee, Margaret: *Gandhi's Religious Thought*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, pp. 19–20.
[45] Gandhi, Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability, p. 27
[46] The Gandhian paternalism can be easily seen in the very term Harijan (person of Hari, i. e. of the god Vishnu) which Gandhi popularized among the Indian public but which is regarded as patronizing by the Dalit activists.

untouchability by de-ritualizing of the castes, where the unclean work of Dalits would be made honourable. These two styles of leadership – confrontationist and accommodative – represented Western influenced modernism on the one hand, and idealistic Hindu traditionalism on the other hand.[47]

During the second Round Table Conference, held from September to December 1931 in London, Ambedkar demanded a separate electorate for the so-called Depressed Classes. Gandhi objected, arguing that this would mean the division of Hindu society,[48] and threatened to fast unto death to reverse the decision of the British government which promised to fulfil Ambedkar's demand.

> "They do not realise that the separate electorate will create division among Hindus so much that it will lead to blood-shed. "Untouchable" hooligans will make common cause with Muslim hooligans and kill caste Hindus. Has the British Government no idea of all this? I do not think so."[49]

Gandhi's fast stirred a disturbance throughout India, and as his health was deteriorating, the Dalit leaders were pushed into signing the agreement with the leaders of the Congress. The so-called „Poona Pact", ratified on 24 September 1932, established a system of reserved seats in the elections in provincial legislative assemblies. The tensions between Gandhi and Ambedkar, however, never disappeared. Ambedkar never stopped criticizing Gandhi for his admiration of the romanticized past, which however made possible to systematically oppress one-seventh of the Indian population, and eventually condemned Gandhism as a "doom for the Untouchables".[50]

2. 2 Jawaharlal Nehru and nation as a rational choice

The most powerful opponent of the Gandhian romantic traditionalism, however, did not emerged from the Dalit community, but in the personality of his political heir Jawaharlal Nehru. As Partha Chatterjee points out, Gandhi's anti-colonial political mobilization and methods on non-violent resistance fulfilled its role as a historically conditional "moment of manoeuvre" during the Independence movement, but it had to be replaced by the more mature

[47] Zelliot, Eleanor M.: Gandhi and Ambedkar – A Study in Leadership. In Mahar, J. Michael (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*. 1972, p. 70.
[48] Note that according to the 1931 Census, the "Depressed Classes" constituted 50,195,770 of the Hindu population of 239,195,000, while the total number of ihnabitants of the British India was 352,837,778. Thus, carving out the Dalits from the Hindu fold would mean the decrease of Hindu share in population only to 54%.
[49] Cited in Zelliot, Eleanor M., Gandhi and Ambedkar – A Study in Leadership. In Mahar, J. Michael (ed.), *The Untouchables in Contemporary India*. 1972, p. 85.
[50] Ambedkar, B. R.: *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. 1945, pp. 285–308.

national-capitalist ideology after the Nehruvian "moment of arrival".[51] The Nehruvian vision, drawing on the secular, liberal and humanist values of the West, did not consider religion, culture and tradition as the unifying element of the Indian nation. For Nehru, the source of the Indian "unity in diversity" consisted in the shared historical past and common future. In his perception, the tremendous diversity of India was to be considered as the very defining principle of the identity of the nation sharing the territory.

> "Some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from out-side, a standardization of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged."[52]

Interestingy, Nehru did not try to identify this unifying instinct as a founding principle of the nation and adhered to the civic principles of the Western liberal nationalism. In his view, the emerging Indian nation was not to be based on common culture and religion, but rather on the principles of liberal citizenship and secular ordering of the public sphere. He was skeptical towards the more communitarian or organic approach of such thinkers as Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose or M. N. Roy, and opted for a more individualistic approach in his nationalist vision, looking at its citizens as worthy of equal respect.

Like most nationalist leaders, Nehru believed that India had degenerated from the golden Upanishadic Age and required radical restructuring.[53] As a person educated in the British colonial system and approaching India "almost as an alien critic",[54] with many objections to its traditions, Nehru shared the values of European Enlightenment and was convinced that the role model for the reorganization of Indian nation was to be found in the modern European societies. On the other hand, Nehru did not consider the Western secularism as something artificially imposed on the Indian society, arguing that the secular consciousness was present in the Indian nation as soon as in the Indus Valley civilization.[55]

While the other political leaders in their attempts to imagine the emerging nation often slipped into various kinds of essentialism, Nehru almost always remained a commited follower of the

[51] Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse?* 1986, p. 131–66.
[52] Nehru, Jawaharlal: *The Discovery of India*. 1989 [1946], p. 62.
[53] Here, Nehru himself falls in the trap of the European orientalism, largely drawing on Max Müller's fascination by allegedly spiritual India posed against the materialist West. See Nehru, Jawaharlal: *The Discovery of India*. 1989 [1946], pp. 76–92.
[54] Ibid., p. 50.
[55] Ibid., p. 60.

rational and secular approach to the world and especially to the state. In his view, religious beliefs and values should be a purely private affair of each citizen, they should not interfere with the processes in the emergent republic, and, ideally, should not enter the public sphere. The supposed Indian traditions were an object of a strong criticism, as they were seen as inherently Brahmanic and thus oppressing the lower castes. [56] Religion was perceived as an obstacle to the further development of the nation, and Nehru attempted to "convert" the Indian population to the ideas of modern science and rationality:

> "Religion, as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural."[57]

Nehru was unsympathetic to the Gandhian idea of decentralized polity consisting of villages, as he considered it as an obstacle to a construction of a strong national unity. Instead, he opted for federation with a strong centre and administratively autonomous states. This stance was closely connected with his preference of industry over agriculture, as he saw the dependence on land as a breeding ground for superstitions and narrow-mindedness. At the end of the day, the Nehruvian project of modernization of India involved the seven "national goals" of national unity, parliamentary democracy, large-scale industrialization, socialism, development of scientific temper, secularism and non-alignment.[58] The notion of secularism was thus perceived as a part of a more complex national philosophy, hardly separable from the other elements.

2. 2. 1 Nehru report

Although the Nehruvian conception of the nation might seem as a reaction on the new post-colonial reality, its origins can be traced as soon as in the 1920s. In 1928, the Indian National Congress prepared a memorandum proposing a new dominion status for India. The so-called Nehru Report, assigned to Jawaharlal's father Motilal Nehru, rejected not only a notion of state religion, but also all conceptions of the nation that would acknowledge intermediate

[56] A similar approach can be seen in B. R. Ambedkar, who considered caste as a religious tyranny preventing India from becoming a genuine nation. According to Ambedkar, it was not possible to break the caste system without annihilating the religious notions on which it is founded. See Ambedkar, B. R., *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. New Delhi: Navayana, [1936] 2014, Chapter 6, pp. 241–244.
[57] Nehru, Jawaharlal: *The Discovery of India*. 1989 [1946], p. 26.
[58] Parekh, Bhikhu: Nehru and the National Philosophy of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXLI, (January 5–12, 1991), No. 1/2, pp. 35–48.

bodies such as religion communities and castes, and did not provide for separate electorates for any community.[59] Under a great influence of Jawaharlal Nehru, who visited Soviet Russia in 1927,[60] the authors argued that religious sentiments would be gradually eroded by modernisation, and castes and communities would be replaced by individuals as the building blocks of the future nation and their political identity will be shaped on economic grounds:

> We are certain that as soon as India is free and can face her problems unhampered by alien authority and intervention, the minds of her people will turn to the vital problems of the day. How many questions that are likely to be considered by our future legislatures can be of communal nature? There may possibily [sic] be a few now and then but there can be no doubt that the vast majority of the question before us will not be communal in the narrow sense. The result will be that parties will be formed in the country and in the legislature on entirely other grounds, chiefly economic we presume. We shall then find Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs in one party acting together and opposing another party which also consists of Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs. This is bound to happen if we once get going.[61]

The strong affection for socialism led Nehru to a conviction that socialism was more than an economic doctrine. It was a "new civilisation" based on a radically transformed "humanity".[62] Thus, the mixed economy based on five-year plans was an integral part of the Nehruvian idea of India, together with the secular state and foreign policy of non-alignment. In the domain of social policy, Nehru was keen on practicing secular politics and appeasing the religious conflicts. As an opponent of caste system, Nehru personaly helped to endorse the special law penalizing the discrimination of Dalits in 1955,[63] in addition to the abolishment of untouchability by the Article 17 of the Indian constitution. In foreign policy, Nehru was a strong proponent of non-alignment in the military pacts and became the initiator of the Non-Aligned movement in 1961.[64] While he even declined the permanent seat in the United

[59] *The Committee Appointed by The All Parties' Conference 1928, The Nehru Report: An Anti-Separatist Manifesto*. New Delhi: Michiko & Panjathan, 1975 [1928], pp. 27–33.
[60] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *India's Silent Revolution. The Rise of the Low Castes in North India Politics*. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003, p. 54
[61] *The Committee Appointed by The All Parties' Conference 1928, The Nehru Report: An Anti-Separatist Manifesto*. New Delhi: Michiko & Panjathan, 1975 [1928], p. 49.
[62] Parekh, Bhikhu: Nehru and the National Philosophy of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXLI, (January 5–12, 1991), No. 1/2, pp. 35–48, p. 37.
[63] The Indian Caste System and the Untouchability (Offenses) Act, 1955.
[64] Chandhoke, Neera: Jawaharlal Nehru's Radical Cosmopolitanism, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49 (November 22, 2014), No. 47, pp. 37–40.

Nations Security Council, Nehru's visions were eroded after the military debacle in the Sino-Indian war of 1962,[65] after which the role of India in internatonal politics diminished.

2. 2. 2 Nehru against Gandhi?

In the common perception, Gandhian and Nehruvian political thinking are often seen as mutually exclusive ideologies. In our perception, however, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of their respective characters. Not only the Gandhian traditionalist and spiritual approach was to be replaced by the Nehruvian modernist-scientific-secularist vision after fulfilling its historical role, as Partha Chatterjee hints at. [66] Even more important qualitative difference between the Gandhian and Nehruvian ideologies lies in the fact that each of them operates on a different level: while the Gandhian *swarāj* is primarily a personal code of conduct pursuable in the domain of ethics and only overlapping from the personal to the political, Nehruvian secularism is intended from the very beginning as a proper political program with is principal aim at organizing the relations between the actors in the political discourse.

One can obviously argue that Nehru was not a proper political philosopher and his two major books, the *Autobiography* and *The Discovery of India* (both written during Nehru's imprisonment), are unsystematic and sometimes even lacking the logical consistency. Nevertheless, it is in Nehru's books where the true ideological elements of the future independent Indian state are sketched out. While Gandhi recommends to "let each do his duty"[67] and does not propose any particular advice to his followers except of self-rule or self-control,[68] Nehru tries to define the basic outlines for the new intended polity. In his searching for the national ideology, the industrial modernization aimed at providing economic self-sufficiency for the newly independent country, and the secular ideology to overarch the fair and just society.

While according to Gandhi, it was machinery that has impoverished the deeply agrarian India,[69] in Nehru's perception agriculture was imposed on India by the colonial powers and the agrarian society persisted in the country only because of their economic policy, while India has enough natural and human resources to compete with the industrialized West. And he was not alone in this opinion: as soon as in 1944, the leading Indian industrialists signed

[65] Godbole, Madhav: *The God Who Failed.* 2014, pp. 48–76.
[66] Chatterjee, Partha: *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World – A Derivative Discourse?* 1986, pp. 131–66.
[67] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909], p. 98
[68] Note that Gandhi relates his conception of pre-modern agrarian society as an ideal model of human coexistence only to India; he recognizes the industrial Britain as an autonomous culture which can choose its own way to achieve social harmony.
[69] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909], p. 88.

the Bombay plan which called for state intervention in strategic industries such as power, transport, water and mines after Independence from the United Kingdom, in order to curb the influence of foreign capital.

The nationalist model of *swadeshi* or self-reliance was present even in the Nehruvian modernism, although in a completely different way: while the Gandhian protesters used to burn the foreign clothes in order to support small local textile manufactures, Nehruvian technocrats built their own steel and power plants in order to produce enough goods to supply the Indian market without dependence on the foreign import. Thus, the Nehruvian industrialization was not a denial of Gandhian ideas, but their development in the conditions of the newly independent Indian state. The Indians were supposed to fulfil their material needs by using the Indian land, Indian materials, Indian labour and Indian technology.[70]

Although seemingly alien to the social reality of the Indian subcontinent, Nehru's national ideology proved to be a best common programme acceptable to the largest number of Indian citizens. Apart from the members ot the Westernized elite to whom it assigned the central role in the construction of the new republic, it was able to attract the majority of Indians by the promises of national unity, strong state, international non-alignment, and even state socialism and agrarian reforms.[71] However, the Nehruvian reformist programme was paradoxically adopted at a time when the radicals in the Congress became weak and all the reforms must have been asserted against the will of the conservative majority within the party, which propelled the elite within the Congress to adopt the "passive revolution" strategy.[72]

2. 3 Nationalism as majoritarianism by V. D. Savarkar

The third nationalist approach found its incarnation in the personality of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966), a Chitpavan Brahman from Maharashtra. Originally an Extremist advocating the use of violence against the British, Savarkar was arrested in London for his part in the assassination plot of Sir Curzon Wyllie and sentenced to 50-year imprisonment. Between 1910 and 1937, he spent 27 years in jail, first in the Cellular Jail in the Andamans and then in Ratnagiri in Maharashtra.

In his pamphlet named "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?", written in the Ratnagiri jail and published anonymously in 1923,[73] Savarkar outlined the conception of Hindu nationalism

[70] Guha, Ramachandra: *India after Gandhi*. p. 209.
[71] Parekh, Bhikhu: Nehru and the National Philosophy of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXLI, (January 5–12, 1991), No. 1/2, pp. 35–48, p. 47.
[72] Kaviraj, Sudipta: A Critique of the Passive Revolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23 (1988), No. 45/47, p. 2432. On passive revolution, see Chapter 9.
[73] Savarkar, V. D.: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969 [1923].

epitomized in the idea of *Hindutva*. The term, coined by Savarkar himself, can be translated as "Hinduness" and can refer to all the three meanings of the word Hindu – i.e. the inhabitant of India, follower of any of the Indian religion, and follower of the particular Hindu religion. In an effort to find a seamless past of a strong Indian nation, Savarkar described Hinduism as an ethnic, cultural and political identity. "Hindus" are seen as patriotic inhabitants of Bharatavarsha, those who consider India (*Bharat*) to be their fatherland (*Pitribhu*) as well as their "holyland" (*Punyabhu*).[74] Savarkar thus extends the concept of "Hindu" beyond religion to a term of ethnic nationalism, identifying Hindus with the inheritors of a postulated Aryan race, which had formed the early Indian nation already in the Vedic times.

For Savarkar, the national identity is defined by three criteria: geographical unity, racial origin, and a common culture. Savarkar, himself a huge admirer of European 19th century nationalists such as Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872),[75] adopts the Western model of ethnic or organic nationalism.[76] This nationalist concept is typical for the Eastern part of Europe with river Rhine as its delimitation and Germany as the main proponent. Seeking to unite the territory fragmented into numerous small states, the German intelligentsia of the 18th and 19th century, with Johann Gottfried von Herder as its most powerful thinker, tended to emphasize the importance of ethnic descent and cultural ties. Nation is thus believed to be an organic unit formed by the pre-political categories such as language, ethnicity, culture, religion, rituals and customs. Savarkar embraces this organic conception with virtually no change, he only adjusts it to the Indian reality and provides with indigenous terms, as he asserts that "[w]e are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilization)."[77]

Savarkar's conception of Hinduism includes all Dharmic religions such as Buddhism and Jainism; even the Sikhs and tribal peoples who do not worship the same gods are considered as Hindus, because their beliefs are linked to Indian territory. On the other hand, Muslims and Christians are excluded from the Hindu nation, as their holy land lay elsewhere and their mythology is different. Savarkar also outlines his vision of a Hindu Nation (*Hindu Rashtra*) as United India (*Akhand Bharat*), purpotedly stretching across the entire Indian subcontinent.

[74] Ibid., p. 115. Note that Savarkar was probably the first and the last to call India a fatherland (*pitrubhu*) and not a motherland (*matrubhumi*). To introduce this Western usage, he had to bend the Sanskrit grammar and use the masculine term *bhu* instead of the common feminine *bhumi*. Ashis Nandy interprets this as a proof that Hindutva has had a strong masculine content from the very beginning. See Nandy, Ashis: *The Demonic and the Seductive in Religious Nationalism: Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and the Rites of Exorcism in Secularizing South Asia*. Working Paper No. 44. South Asia Institute Department of Political Science Heidelberg University, February 2009.

[75] The affection for Mazzini's republican radicalism was widely shared by the fellow Indian liberals of the time. See Bayly, C. A.: *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 108–110.

[76] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*. 1996, p. 26.

[77] Savarkar, V. D., *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* 1969 [1923], p. 92.

The non-Hindus are welcome to inhabit this land only on condition that they renounce their allegiance to their alien gods, otherwise they will be treated as second-class citizens:

> "That is why in the case of some of our Mohammedan or Christian countrymen who had originally been forcibly converted to a non-Hindu religion and who consequently have inherited along with Hindus, a common Fatherland and a greater part of the wealth of a common culture—language, law, customs, folklore and history—are not and cannot be recognized as Hindus.For though Hindusthan to them is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a Holyland too. Their Holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of a foreign origin. Their love is divided. Nay, if some of them be really believing what they profess to do, then there can be no choice — they must, to a man, set their Holyland above their Fatherland in their love and allegiance."[78]

The main exponents of the Hindutva ideology emerged soon after. In 1925, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteers' Organisation) was formed by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar as a paramilitary organisation to protect the Hindu culture against foreigners. After the World War II, another related organisations were founded. The *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP, World Hindu Council) was established in 1964 to promote Hindu values and keep in touch with all the Hindus living abroad. On the political scene, the Hindutva ideology is represented by the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP, Indian Popular Party), which was created in 1980 as a succesor of an extreme Hindu party *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (BJS, Indian People's Union), formed in 1951. The RSS, VHP, BJP and other Hindu organisations are affiliated in the *Sangh Parivar* (Family of Associations). Through this close association of more organisations, the Hindu nationalism shares attributes of both a social movement and a political party. Savarkar's *Hindutva* was also adopted by the Hindu conservative party *Hindu Mahasabha* as a kind of its long-time manifesto.

The Hindutva ideology was obviously in a sharp contrast with Nehru's view of the Indian nation, whose construction could only be rooted in secular individual identities. Hindu communalism, i. e. dominance and self-assertion of one religious community, was seen as a negation of the national state. As Nehru noted in 1951:

[78] Ibid., p. 113.

> "Hindus are in a majority in this country and whatever they wish will be done. But the moment you talk of a Hindu Rashtra you speak in a language which no other country except one can comprehend and that country is Pakistan because they are familiar with this concept. … Hindu Rashtra can only mean one thing and that is you leave the modern way and get into a narrow, old-fashioned way of thinking, and fragment India into pieces. Those who are not Hindus will be reduced in status."[79]

Although Nehru, himself a modernist, could not resist the temptation to condemn Hindutva as an "old-fashioned way of thinking", it would be a huge mistake to treat Hindu nationalism as something archaic. On the contrary, similarly to other ethnic nationalisms, Hindu nationalism is not an orthodox or "extreme" form of traditional religion, but a purely modernist doctrine which seeks to imagine a community on the basis of a common culture and transform Hinduism into the national ideology. Savarkar, himself a "believer in public who did not believe in private,"[80] used religion only as a political instrument to unite the Indian nation. Similarly, the first *Sarsanghchalak* of the RSS, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940), was a doctor with modern education with a poor awareness of folk Hinduism. In fact, most ideologues of Hindutva since Savarkar until today have neither come from the orthodox Hindu circles nor have proclaimed themselves the followers of any Hindu cult. Instead, they have always shown their affection towards the 19th century Hindu reform movements, which aimed at modernizing and rationalizing the supposedly corrupt religion. The Hindu reformism is here viewed as an analogy to Protestant reformation which corrects the vices of the degraded Catholic-style Hindu orthodoxy.[81]

Similarly, the founder of Pakistan, Mohamad Ali Jinnah, was a westernized secular intellectual loyal to constitutionalism, and an admirer of the classical liberal Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915), the political mentor of Gandhi. According to Jinnah's two-nation theory, religion was taken as the determining factor in defining the nationality of Indian Muslims, while the other identities were pushed aside. Thus, Islam was used only as a unifying element for the creation of a new independent state. It is no surprise that the theory was strongly supported by Savarkar, as it perfectly mirrored his concept of Hindutva.

[79] Nehru, Jawaharlal: A Hindu Rashtra. In *The Oxford India Nehru: Edited By Uma Iyengar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1951], pp. 64–65.
[80] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), p. 182.
[81] This teleological interpretation of the Hindu reformist movements is however problematic. Although there were some obvious attempts to emulate the structure of Christianity which was partly seen as a competing religion, the socio-religious reformist movements had been present in Hinduism over a period of three millenia. See Zavos, John: *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*. 2000, pp. 38–50.

Ironically, although Pakistan was defined on the religious basis, Jinnah did not want it to become a religious state and would have liked to keep its secular character.[82]

Apart from their different resources and contradictory conclusions of their theories, the other important difference between the three concepts of Indian identity consisted in their social background. While the pan-Indian nationalist ideology, promoted by Gandhi and Nehru, was developed and spread by the Western-educated Indian elites, the ideology of Hindu nationalism was primarily the domain of the Indian middle class.[83] This is especially important, as we will see that the wrestle among the three principal streams of Indian political thought can be read as a struggle for hegemony in the newly emerged state. As Christophe Jaffrelot points out, the conflict between Nehruvian secularism and Hindu nationalism has not existed solely on the ideological basis. Interestingly, for the whole first half of the 20th century, the politics of the city of Allahabad was dominated by two prominent families – the Nehru and the Malaviyas. This long-time rivalry between the modernists and the traditionalists eventually led into a split within the Congress and foundation of the Independent Congress Party by Madan Mohan Malaviya.[84] As the Nehruvian vision soon gained upper hand, the Hindu nationalist stance was marginalized until the beginning of the 1980 which brought a considerable change in the political behaviour of the Indian public on the one hand, and the abandonment of the original Nehruvian secular ideology by the Indian state on the other hand. Similarly, the rise of the Hindu nationalism and politicization of the Babri masjid case was possible only after the Indian urban middle class attained a certain size.[85]

[82] See See Muhammad Ali Jinnah's first Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (August 11, 1947). Online, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_assembly_1947.html
[83] See Zavos, John: *Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*. 2000, pp. 9–14.
[84] Jaffrelot, Silent Revolution, pp. 52–54.
[85] See Nandy, Ashis, Trivedy, Shikha, Mayaram, Shail, Yagnik, Achyut: *Creating a Nationality. The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

3. The architecture of the Constitution

> "The very idea of a theocratic state is not only medieval but also stupid. In modern times the people may have their religion but not the State."[86]

The issue of Indian identity was again discussed after the World War II, when the British surrender of the Indian Empire and its subsequent division into the two new dominions was inevitable. According to the Mountbatten plan, religion was used as a clue in the formation of the new independent states. India was formed out of the majority Hindu regions of the colony, and Pakistan from the majority Muslim areas. This was a severe blow to both Gandhian and Nehruvian concepts of the Indian society and polity. As Nehru himself mentioned:

> In this connection we should mention the case of neighbouring Pakistan, which became an Islamic republic with an official state religion. Even the Muslims of British India before partition did not form a monolithic community with a single communal identity or interest, as Muhammad Ali Jinnah and other advocates of separate Pakistan argued. The sense of a versatile Indian identity has been deeply rooted even within the Muslim citizens, and the partition was to a large extent a consequence of the "divide and rule" politics of the fading British administration who took advantage of the religious sentiments in order to play off one community against another. The original idea of the Two-Nation Theory was not to divide British India, but to prevent the creation of a unitary central state and secure the rights of the Muslim minority against the Hindu majority. The Muslim insistence on a separate state crystallized only in the decade before 1947, after the Congress influenced by the nationalist Hindus lost the trust of Muslims.[87]

3. 1 India as a Negation of Pakistan?

As the partition of 1947 saw huge population exchanges with subsequent Hindu-Muslim riots, the most important task for the new Indian state was to preserve and consolidate India's unity and to assure the protection for all its inhabitants. The Indian Constituent Assembly met for three years between 1946 and 1949 to debate the character of the new state. The Gandhian vision of an independent India that would return to traditional habits of rule soon faded from the public imagination and so did the very personality of Gandhi, who was assassinated by the

[86] Nehru, Jawaharlal: Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series, vol. 4. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986. Cited in De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism* 2015, p. 214.
[87] Cited in Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 163.

Hindu fanatic Nathuram Godse. As the Hindu nationalist movement was discredited after this tragedy, the Nehruvian conception of a tolerable Indianness gradually gained the upper hand in the discussions. After long deliberations both in the Constituent Assembly and in the Indian National Congress, Nehru's democratic and reformist approach to a modern Indian state outweighed the more conservative one, represented by the right wing of the Congress led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the designated Deputy Prime Minister of India and its Minister of Home Affairs.

Thus, the Constitution, promulgated on 26 January 1950, announced that India would be a "sovereign, democratic republic",[88] and was written in the best Western tradition. Its architects led by Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar drew on many external sources, but they were most heavily influenced by the British model of parliamentary democracy and the Constitution of the United States of America. Apart from the basic parliamentary features, the constitutional structure of the new republic took into account also the peculiarities of India. In the view of its founders, India could be unified only by accepting its immense diversity. The emergence of a strong national identity and the preservation of India's colourfulness were seen not as a contraposition, but as simultaneous processes.[89] Thus, the document also established a federal structure of the territory, and provided for distribution of powers between the Union and the States. Regional cultural identities were perceived as a part of the all-India identity, and the linguistic reorganization of the states followed soon. Although the Prime Minister Nehru was personally opposed to the idea of ethnolinguistic states, the Indian government accepted the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956, which was further refined in the following years. Until the Twenty-First Amendment of the Constitution in 1967,[90] the country recognised 14 official regional languages, and then this number was increased to 18. Today, the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 official languages. The Constitution introduced also federalism with state governments responsible to the state legislatures, but with a distribution of powers inclining towards the Union. The Constitution also accepted a certain form of asymmetry and provided special self-government provisions for the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the Article 370. The Indian federalism is thus sometimes dubbed as quasi-federalism, mainly because of its deviations from the U.S. federal model.[91]

[88] The words "secular" and "socialist" were added as late as in 1976. Cf. *Constitution of India*, Preamble. Online: https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india [2018/03/20].
[89] Chandra, Bipan, Mukherjee, Mridula, Mukherjee, Aditya: *India After Independence 1947–2000*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000, p. 84
[90] The Constitution (Twenty-first Amendment) Act, 1967. Online: https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-twenty-first-amendment-act-1967 [2018/03/20].
[91] Cf. Wheare, Kenneth C.: *Federal Government*. 1964 [1946].

While Pakistan became a Muslim religious state, India adopted secularism as its state ideology, although Nehru himself was well aware that the word secularism is not a very happy one. In his conception, secularism was defined differently from the dictionary meaning, and corresponded more with religious, social and political equality at the state level. Nevertheless, he remained a secularist in private and perceived religion as a purely private affair of each citizen, which should not interfere with the state action, and in the ideal case should not even enter the public space. Influenced by the liberalism of the West, Nehru was committed to the rational and secular organization of the society and believed that religious values and beliefs would stand in the way to the idea of progress and modernity. Together with the other left-wing Congress leaders, he believed that acknowledgement of the communitarian sensibilities in politics would justify and reinforce them.

3. 2 Equality of citizens

Although the framers of the Indian Constitution shared the liberal assumption that individual autonomy and liberty would ensure religious tolerance and cultural diversity, they deviated from the liberal framework and created a specifically Indian version of secularism. Given the cultural diversities and structural disparities within the Indian polity, they were well aware that the equal dignity to all individuals is not enough, and they differentiated between four kinds of groups which deserved special treatment – communities based on religion, language, caste, and tribe.

As for the caste, which was perceived as the greatest cultural continuity across the subcontinent, the Constitution has outlawed caste-based discrimination. At the same time, however, the Government of India has officially documented castes through the census, and the Constitution lays down general principles for the policy of affirmative action. The untouchables or Dalits (legally known as Scheduled Castes, because the government keeps them on a special list), who were placed at the bottom of caste hierarchy, were reserved a certain number of seats in government jobs and public universities. The concern behind this measure was to set aside existing social prejudices so that the marginalized could have access to resources that were available to the rest of the population. However, the reservation politics also accentuated the social differences between Dalits and the rest of the society, although their marginalization was more ritual then economic. Therefore, the Backward Classes Commission was created, listing further 2399 backward castes or communities throughout the country,[92] but the extension of reservations was postponed. Besides that, the government of

[92] The commission also recommended that women of all categories should be designated as backward and given special consideration.

federal states have introduced their own quota for the Scheduled Castes depending on local demographic structure.

While the reservations for the Scheduled Castes were intended to remove their historical discrimination, reservations for the Scheduled Tribes, as well as provisions for religious and linguistic communities, were focused on protection of their distinctive way of life and culture. Drawing from the Prime Minister Nehru's concept based upon the secular and humanist values of the West, the authors adopted religious neutrality as a key feature of its constitution and the cornerstone of the strategy for nation-building. According to the Article 25, the individual freedom of religion is guaranteed as a fundamental right, and all citizens are allowed to freely profess, practice and propagate their religion. Apart from that, however, the religious communities are governed by their personal law systems, such as the Sharia for Muslims. This approach was rather a deviation from the secularist framework which was caused by historical circumstances. Since the first Governor General of Bengal, Warren Hastings, toleration was introduced as the official policy of the British rule in India. In practice, the colonial state tolerated the practices belonging to the religious laws of the various religious communities such as Hindus, Muslims or Christians. The Muslim Personal Law, partly based on Sharia law, has passed only on 7 October 1937 by the British administration,[93] and there was a strong pressure from the Muslim community to retain the recently acquired benefits. The case of Hindu personal law was largely similar to the Muslim one, as the British administration had tolerated and codified the law of Manu, who was considered as a "lawgiver" similar to Moses in Jewish tradition. The attempts to reform the Hindu personal law into the single Hindu Code Bill faced a strong resistance within the Congress Party, and resulted only into passing four partial code bills, reforming the areas of marriage, succession, guardianship and adoption. Thus, although the Constitution calculates upon the imposition of the uniform civil code, this has never come into practice in spite of demands made both by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Minister of Law and Justice B. R. Ambedkar.

Did the constitution depart from the secular principles by accepting the community-based rights? Or it has no other option when dealing with specific features of the Indian socio-cultural context? As Rajeev Bhargava argues, secularism in India *had to be different* from the Western liberal model which does not recognize communities, as there was a host of characteristic differing from the Western experience. First, the deep religious diversity of Indian polity. Second, the general emphasis of the South Asian religions on practice rather than belief, which make the religion more public and sustained by communities. Third, the presence of oppressive practices within the religious communities and consequent need to

[93] The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. Online: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1325952/

reduce such domination through powerful movements and institutions. And fourth, the absence of an organized institution in Hinduism that could emulate the Church, which effectively meant that the responsibility for limiting the domination of the communities by making them more liberal. In these conditions, it was necessary to adopt a certain level of communitarianism to prevent inter-religious conflict and struggle against oppressive communities.[94] However, given the constitutional setup, the Indian state permanently had to balance between the politics of equal dignity and politics of difference and prove its viability as an art of the possible. It was thus the Indian political practice which shaped the secular political theory, not vice versa. The Indian encounter with secularism did not have a character of imposition of an alien theoretical framework on a pre-modern society deeply rooted in its religious traditions, but rather of a refinement of the carefully selected model of a good political practice.

3. 2. 1 Majority–minority framework

Articles 29 and 30 of the constitution granted special rights to groups and minorities to maintain their language, script or culture, and to establish educational institutions of their choice. Establishing a special sub-committee on minorities, the makers of the constitution accepted the idea that permanent minorities needed special provisions to protect their rights. By incorporating them, the framers of the constitution accepted the majority–minority framework.

As Rajeev Bhargava observes, the notion of majorities and minorities can be understood in two ways: either in the democratic sense of the aggregation of preferences (preference-based majority and minority), or in the communitarian sense by the more of less permanent attributes which constitute the very identity of individuals, such as language, culture or religion (identity-dependent majority and minority). If the second case occurs and the identity-dependent majorities and minorities enter the democratic elections, there is a possibility that they will not act as a set of individuals, but as a group with more or less permanent desire. If the desires of the majority concern the basic structure and organization of the society, it may throw the minority into permanent insecurity. Bhargava calls this the majority–minority syndrome which can be solved by deploying the majority–minority framework which gives the minorities some power to shape the social and political structure of the society. [95]

[94] Bhargava, Rajeev: *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*. 2010, 85–86.
[95] Ibid., pp. 16–22.

Of course, there is also a possibility to abandon the framework as such and avoid the very notion of majority and minority to dissolve the syndrome. As Bhargava mentions, there are basically four ways how to deal with the syndrome. The first alternative is to draw on the resources of local cultural and religious traditions and to rediscover the traditional ways of living together. This alternative assumes that the very notion of majority and minority was created by the modern democratic politics during the formation of the modern nation-states. Rejecting the binary framework would thus mean to reject the modernity itself. The problem of this approach lies in the very fact that the very notion of corrupt modernity juxtaposed against the pristine tradition creates another binary opposition which does not reflect the reality. This approach can be identified with the Gandhian conception of the Indian state, which was later revived by the anti-modernists.

The second alternative offers homogenization of individuals by transforming the identity constituting features into preferences. This approach, close to the Nehruvian vision of society, requires a conceptual move from the communitarian identity-dependent to the individualist preference-based notion of majority and minority. Practically, this means a refusal or withdrawal of special rights or privileges from minority groups and their replacement with a uniform charter of civic rights. The weakness of this model, however, lies in its insensitivity to cultural identities. It is hardly believable that people would abandon their religions and other social attachments, especially in not yet fully modern India.

The third alternative proposes the homogenization of individuals by assimilating the minorities within an overwhelming majority according to its own identity-constituting features, thus depriving the minority of its special rights. This is an especially undesirable solution, as it requires use of manipulation or of force. However, this Savarkarite approach, advocated by the Hindu nationalists, slowly raised to prominence as the Hindu majority felt neglected by the state which provided the religious minorities with special rights.

The fourth alternative envisages the politics of "overlapping good" with various groups and individuals deliberating over their ideas of the good life, ultimately converging on a conception shared by all. However, although an attractive ideal, the conditions for its realization are hardly possible to reach. The framers of the Indian constitution thus chose the social majority–minority framework as a means to ensure social justice for all the diverse groups in India. On the other hand, it was the Nehruvian vision of a constantly modernizing and liberalizing society leading to the ultimate abandonment of all primordial sentiments which was adopted as the national ideology of India. This is also why the reserved seats for

the Scheduled Castes and Tribes,[96] and partially even the role of English as *lingua franca*[97] were adopted only as temporary measures.

Indian Constitution preceded the liberalism of the second half of the 20th century which was more sensitive to community distinctions.[98] There is, however one significant difference: Unlike in the West, collective rights were not preceded by a uniform structure of social and civil laws. The biggest problem thus emerged in the issue of gender equality. As the minority rights in cultural matters were conceded before gender equality, the preservation of cultural autonomy tended to perpetuate group discrimination by justifying community laws which subordinate women as a group. [99]

3. 3 The secularism debate

As we have already mentioned, independent India refused to accept the confessional definition of the nation and endorsed the secular approach to the state and religion. Interestingly enough, the word "secularism" appears neither in the Objectives Resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly in December 1946, nor in the very Constitution which came into effect on 26 January 1950. The definition of India as a "secular" republic was inserted into the preamble of the Constitution only in 1976.[100] There is general problem with the world "secularism". Coined by George Jacob Holyoake (1817–1906) in 1851 as a derivation from the Latin word "saeculum" meaning century or age, it is a relatively new term which does not have a proper Indian equivalent. Interestingly, all the discussions on the relation between religion and the state revolve around the concept described by Indian neologisms, which are nevertheless translations of the English original. There is hardly any term in any Indian language which would refer to the same role of religion in the state and society as the word "secular" does.[101] Basically, there are two different interpretation of secularism which overlap both in the Western and in the Indian discourse. While Gandhi's doctrine can be described in the Sanskrit words '*sarva dharma sambhava*', meaning equality of all religions, Nehru's approach towards religions could be described as '*dharma*

[96] Article 334 of the Constitution had originally required the reservation of elected seats to cease in 1960, but this was extended to 1970 by the 8th Amendment. The period of reservation was further extended to 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 by the 23rd, 45th, 62nd and 79th Amendments respectively. The 95th Amendment extended the period of reservation to 2020.
[97] The use of English for official purposes was originally to cease 15 years after the constitution came into effect, i.e. in 1965. However, because of widespread protests in the non-Hindi speaking areas mainly in South India, the Official Languages Act was passed in 1963 which provided that the English language "may, as from the appointed day, continue to be used, in addition to Hindi."
[98] Mahajan, Gurpreet, *Identities and Rights*. 1998, p. 5.
[99] Mahajan, Gurpreet, *Identities and Rights*. 1998, p. 7.
[100] *The Constitution of India* (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976. Online: https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-forty-second-amendment-act-1976 [2018/03/20].
[101] Chatterjee, Partha: *Empire and Nation.* 2010, p. 208.

nirapekṣatā'. In this conception, state should not involve in religious matters and provide freedom of religion (and irreligion) for all its citizens. As Nehru was a genuine non-believer somehow uneasy with the religious feelings and passions, there is often a misconception of his notion of secularism as discouraging or even hostile towards religions. However, Nehru himself made clear on various occasions that his conception of secularism is not opposed to religion:

> "It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word for 'secular'. Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honours all faith equally and gives them equal opportunities; that, as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion."[102]

Secularization, after all, does not mean that religiosity disappears; it only implies that religion is just one of the possible ways in which people understand themselves and their relationships. However, the more strict Nehruvian definition of secularism, which is almost exactly what is taken as the worldwide meaning of the term, was not much shared by other Indian leaders, and it was soon explicitly rejected by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, philosopher and India's second President:

> "When India is said to be a secular state, it does not mean that we reject the reality of an Unseen Spirit or the relevance of religion to life or that we exalt irreligion… Though faith in the Supreme is the basic principle of the Indian tradition, the Indian state will not identify itself or be controlled by any particular religion. We hold that not one religion should be given preferential status or unique distinction."[103]

This seemingly paradoxical blending of the idea of liberal rights with the supreme will and principle of eternity became unexpectedly popular in the public life. The post-Nehruvian Indian secularism thus does not lie in the strict separation of state and religion, but rather in equal respecs to all the religious faiths. Radhakrishnan's definition of secularism thus paradoxically contributed to its erosion, which was being carried out particularly by the Hindu nationalist organizations such as RSS and BJS/BJP, who protested against the Hindu Code Bill in 1955–1956, and often criticize the alleged "pseudo-secularism" of the Congress and other parties.

[102] Gopal, Sarvepalli: *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*. 1980, p. 330.
[103] Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli: *Recovery of Faith*. 1956, p. 202.

3. 3. 1 Hinduism as an inherently tolerant religion?

There is another common misconception that often blunders the debate about Indian secularism. Virtually all parties to the debate hold the opinion that the inhabitants of Indian subcontinent are inherently tolerant, what they take as a proof for their argument. The anti-secularists and anti-modernists assert that Indian polity has a long tradition of religious tolerance and there is no need to implement any modernist measures to regulate the relation between state and communities. The secularists, on the other hand, appraise the examples of tolerant rulers from the history as a proof that India has a long record of secular approach to governance. Both of these approaches are misplaced. It is true that some cultures, such as the Indian composite society, have accomodated a higher degree of diversity, plurality and tolerance than other ones. However, it does not mean that these cultures were always absolutely tolerant. As the Romila Thapar remarks, there were incidents of "Hindu" sects destroying Buddhist and Jaina temples in the early medieval period, showing that the popular image of the peaceful Indian religions is simply untrue (Thapar, 1989).[104] In fact, the notion of India as a deeply religious country dominated by a single powerful Hindu culture is a fiction imposed by the Western orientalist understanding and further reinforced not only by the likes of Samuel Huntington who use the strongly essentialized stereotypes in their definitions of incompatible civilizations, but also by the very Hindu nationalists for more than a century.[105] By adopting this essentialized perception of different cultures, the anti-modernists and anti-secularists actually accept the Hindu majoritarian assertion that the tolerance in the Indian society is linked with its Hindu traditions and thus there should be more space for recognition of the Hindu values within the societ. On the other hand, there is a strong tendency by the liberal and secular thinkers to exaggerate the impact of secularism on the toleration in the society. As De Roover observes, the modernists and secularists often fall into the trap of the perceived impeccability of secularism as the best possible system. For secularists, there is no cognitive space for alternative forms of pluralism within the secular framework. The possibilities are restricted to a normative disjunction: *either* one pursues secularism and toleration *or* one ends up in religious oppression and conflict. [106] This is obviously a false dilemma, as religious and cultural toleration is not bound exclusively to secularism, and this narrow perception only prevents its holders to recognize other possible forms of coexistence.

[104] Thapar, Romila, 1989. Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 23 (1989), No. 2, 209–231.
[105] Hansen, Thomas Blom: The Saffron Wave. 1999, p. 11.
[106] De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*. 2015, p. 205.

3. 4 Role of the Indian National Congress

When analyzing the emergence of the independent Indian state, one must not forget the crucial role of the Indian National Congress, which was by far the most powerful political force during the time of the constitutional debates, and for a long time *de facto* substituted not only all parties to the discussion, but the Indian public as a whole. Established in 1885 as the first political party in India (and even in Asia), the Congress soon became one of the leading forces of the anti-colonial movement. Transforming itself from a loose group of Indian elites into the mass party organization under M. K. Gandhi's leadership in the 1920s and 1930s, it played an important role in the creation of the democratic party system.

As a pan-Indian party, Congress had included a vast array of ideological platforms, united with the common goal of gaining Independence from the British administration. After achieving this objective, the party split into several ideological groups with different economic programmes. The socialists led by Jayaprakash Narayan were the first to leave the party, followed by Gandhians who started with their own active grassroots work in the villages. The death of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in 1950 weakened the influence of the conservative wing and left the industrialist faction as the most powerful interest group within the party. In spite of this, Congress has remained a broad conglomerate of various opinion platforms, representing the historical consensus and enjoying a continuing basis of electoral support.

Almost from the very beginning of the independent Indian state, Congress acted as a centrist party devoted to democracy, minority rights and secularism. Its economic policy was to a huge extent influenced by the post-war economic thinking which promoted the state interference with economy, but also by the views of its leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. Inspired by the Fabian socialism and almost uncritically admiring the economic success of the Soviet Union, Nehru together with the Indian industrialists prompted the elaboration of the economic plan for the protection of the domestic enterprise, and helped to create the Planning Commission in 1950. Since then, the mixed economy model was applied in India and national economy was managed according to the five-year plans.

3. 4. 1 Natural party of government?

For a long time, the case of Congress dominance the multi-party system remained quite unique among the newly decolonized countries of the so-called Third World.[107] It operated as

[107] The term "Third World" (Tiers Monde) was coined by the French demographer and economist Alphred Sauvy in his article in L'Observateur on 14 August 1952. The term was analogous with the Third Estate during

a heterogeneous catch-all centrist party, deriving its legitimacy from its role in the Independence movement. With the help of the first-past-the post electoral system, Congress was able to bridge all the cleavages between various castes, religions, classes or languages, and obtain a clear majority in the *Lok Sabha*.[108] Besides the legacy of the anti-colonial resistance, Congress could also build on its developed party organization, and the network of contacts and alliances with the landlords and other influential men in the Indian villages, town and districts, which was also established on the basis of links and loyalties inherited from the British era. In this relationship, the party provided patronage for the local Congress representatives to maintain their influence over local voters in return for votes they were capable to obtain in the elections.[109]

3. 4. 2 The "Congress system"

Despite the multi-party system and free elections, Congress retains its dominant (or predominant) position to such an extent that the party system is often dubbed "Congress system"[110] or "dominance coexisting with competition but without a trace of alternation".[111] During the first two decades after the Independence, Congress included such a wide array of political trends both from the Left and the Right that it substituted virtually all the Indian party system and the opposition parties were forced to operate at the very margins of the political spectrum. Rajni Kothari thus call the Congress as the "party of consensus" and the oppositional parties as "parties of pressure", as they did not constitute alternatives to the ruling party and their role was only to pressurize, criticize and influence it from the margins.[112]

The number of opposition parties was quite high – from the Socialist Party and Communist Party of India on the Left to the Bharatiya Jana Sangh on the Right and strong regional parties such as Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab or Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, which helped the Congress to capitalize on the first-past-the-post system. The opposition parties

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the French Revolution, referring to countries that were unaligned with either the communist Soviet bloc or the capitalist NATO bloc during the Cold War.

[108] Chhibber, Pradeep K., Petrocik, John R.: Social Cleavages, Elections, and the Indian Party System. In Hasan, Zoya (ed.): *Parties and Party Politics in India*. 2002, pp. 64–65.

[109] Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, pp. 17–18.

[110] Kothari, Rajni: The Congress 'System' in India. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12. (Dec., 1964), pp. 1161–1173.

[111] Morris-Jones, Wyndraeth H., *Politics Mainly Indian*. 1978, p. 217.

[112] Kothari, Rajni: The Congress 'System' in India. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12. (Dec., 1964), p. 1162.

were able to challenge the Congress only after they reached a high "index of opposition unity".[113]

As a result, the biggest political conflicts and debates of the time were taking place not between the Congress and opposition parties, but within the very Congress. There was such plurality of opinions and ideas within the party including a considerable level of independence and diversity of its regional cells that it was not only representative and flexible enough, but it also simulated the political competition as such. By absorbing the groups and movements from outside the party, it was also able to prevent other parties from gaining in strength.[114]

Until 1967, Congress was able to keep the virtually uninterrupted power in all the Indian states. After the death of Nehru, however, the party goes through a deep crisis. The conflict between the leftist and rightist group regarding the question of succession resulted in the brief interregnum of Lal Bahadur Shastri and eventually the coming of Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi.

[113] The Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) is counted by dividing the vote of the largest opposition party by the sum of votes of all the opposition parties, and multiplying by 100. The resulting index can vary from 0 to 100. The higher it is, the greater is the unity of the opposition (i.e. if there is only one opposition party, the final IOU is clearly 100). Until the beginning of the 1990s, the IOU amounted to around 70 and reached its high of 90 in the 1977 elections when the opposition united against the Congress after the Emergency, but then disintegrated only to 65 in 1980. Although the Congress lost further support in percentage of votes in 1991, it managed to gain 35 seats due to the drop in opposition unity from 77 to 66. See Butler, David, Lahiri, Ashok, Roy, Prannoy Roy: India Decides: Elections 1952-1995. In Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): State and Politics in India. 1998, pp. 161–164.
[114] Kothari, Rajni, The Congress 'System' in India. *Asian Survey*, Vol. 4, No. 12. (Dec., 1964), pp. 1163–1164.

4. Erosion of the secular idea

As soon as in 1963, Donald E. Smith called attention to contradictory positions of the Indian secularism in some areas such as temple administration or personal law. Despite these flaws, he believed thath the Indian state was secular.[115] At the same time, however, he thought that if the principle of strict separation of religion from the state remained violated, the secularism would fall into crisis. History proved that Smith was right, but only partly.

In the 1980s, given the unprecedental rise of the communal riots, the Indian debate focused on finding the reasons of the supposed crisis of secularism. Basically, we can identify two different approaches in this debate. According to some authors, the Indian state is responsible for the crisis, as it has not been neutral towards religions, has not treated the different religious communities equally and intervened in the affairs of some of them.[116] The second kind of criticism asserts that the very concept of secularism was deemed to be unsuccessful in India, as it represented an alien ideology imposed on a population with a mindset different from the Western one.[117] My position in this debate is closer to the former group of critics. In my opinion, the true reason of the crisis of Indian secularism did not emerge because of the inconsistencies in the legal framework of the state, but rather in the opportunist and populist politics of the Indian ruling elite. In this chapter, we will therefore briefly delve into the political history of independent India to see how the secular idea was practiced during the Nehruvian era, and how it was distorted as a consequence of the political events of the 1970s and 1980s which induced the shift in the understanding of the Indian approach towards multicultural politics. The second group of critics of the Indian secularism will be analysed in the next chapter.

4. 1 Paradox of the Indian secularism

The original idea of the secularism which was present in Europe since the Enlightenment period supposes that the state power and institutions should function independently on the religion. However, the idea of secularism can be understood in two different ways.[118] While the first approach supposes *neutrality* of the state which allows the citizens to practice any religion freely, the second approach is more rigid: the state should keep its *equidistance* from

[115] Smith, Donald Eugene: *India as a Secular State*. 1963.
[116] See Brass, Paul: Secularism Out of its Place. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Volume: 32 issue: 2, 1998, pp: 485–505; Chatterjee, Partha: Secularism and Toleration. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29, No. 28 (Jul. 9, 1994), pp. 1768–1777; Tambiah, Stanley: "The Crisis of Secularism in India," in Bhargava, Rajeev (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 418–453.
[117] Madan, Nandy
[118] Sen, Amartya: The Argumentative Indian. 2005, pp. 19–20. See also Chatterjee, Partha: Secularism and Toleration. 1994, pp. 1769–1770.

different religions (including agnosticism and atheism) and act as if no religion existed, or even prohibit its manifestation in public institutions. So, while France has accepted the second, more radical notion of secularism (as can be seen in the notorious ban of wearing headscarves by Muslim women students),[119] India has opted for the first version, which is considerably broader.

However, there is one more possible interpretation of secularism, which is genuinely Indian. As Paul Brass observes, secularism in the Indian political discourse is a peculiar form of nationalism: in the Indian popular perception, secularism serves as a peacemaker between the communal animosities and antagonisms. Thus, secularism is in fact defined by its opposite, meaning national unity and the contraposition of separatism or communalism. Accordingly, secularists are a peculiar kind of nationalists who believe and teach that Indian history is the history of all nations, ethnicities and communities living in the subcontinent. In this view, secularists are opposed to the Hindu nationalists who believe that the history of great Hindu civilization was disrupted by the Muslim conquerors in the medieval period. The secularists, on the contrary, refer to the long tradition of Indian pluralism and religious tolerance, which they identify with secularism. This perception draws largely from the Nehruvian sense of unifying instinct of the Indian peoples, but it deviates from it in terms of political practice. For the secular nationalists, it is necessary to provide maximum freedom to all groups to practise their religion and to promote their cultures and languages. For the secular nationalist, India is and should remain a cultural mosaic composed of many different religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups. On the other hand, the Hindu nationalists believe that the state must be united in the same manner as the Western nations, which means that all the citizens should adopt a common civil identity and common civil law. As a result, the secular political parties can be recognized by the fact that they do not assert a uniform civil code.[120]

4. 2 Hindu Code Bill and the Congress "pseudosecularism"

The urge for the uniform civil code has been implemented in the Indian Constitution among the Directive Principles of State Policy section,[121] along with other measures to promote the welfare of the people and secure social, political and economic justice. Thus, Article 44 of the Constitution reads: *"The State shall endeavour to secure for citizens a uniform civil code*

[119] For the theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of "choice inhibition" when the individual decisions are not entirely free but dependent on the decision of more powerful members of the community, see: Sen, Amartya, "Liberty and Social Choice", Journal of Philosophy, 80 (January 1983); "Minimal Liberty", Economica, 59 (1992); and Rationality and Freedom.

[120] Brass, Paul: Indian Secularism in Practice. *Indian Journal of Secularism*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan–Mar 2006), pp. 115–132.

[121] *Constitution of India*, Part IV (Articles 36–51). The concept of Directive Principles of State Policy was originally borrowed from the Irish Constitution.

throughout the territory of India." However, the Directive Principles serve only as a guide for the State and are not enforceable by any court. Thus, despite being required by the Constitution as a prerequisite of a just society, the uniform civil code has never been endorsed. Although the demand was made both by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Minister of Law and Justice B. R. Ambedkar, they soon found themselves in a tricky situation. The Muslim Personal Law, which was partly based on Sharia law, had been passed only on 7 October 1937 by the British administration,[122] and there was a strong opposition from the Muslim community which did not want to be deprived of their recently acquired benefits. Thus, the Constitutional assembly debates gradually shifted to the issue of the Hindu Code Bill, which was intended to modify the Hindu customs and laws in the domains of marriage, divorce, inheritance and women's right to property. Nehru administration saw such codification as a necessary step to unify the fragmented Hindu community.

The bill was first brought before the provisional Parliament on 5 February 1951, it was confronted with a strong opposition not only by the conservative Hindu politicians and organisations, but also by the senior leaders of the Congress such as Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad. Their argument was that the bill harmed the Hindus as the sole religious community whose laws were to be reformed, and started to demand a uniform civil code again. The second discussion on 17 September 1951 made no difference and Rajendra Prasad as the President of India alleged that such an important measure should not be considered by the unelected Parliament.[123] After the first general elections which took place from October 1951 to February 1952, the Congress government under the premiership of Jawaharlal Nehru was finally able to enforce the bill, although it retreated to a further compromise: the Hindu Code Bill was split into four separate bills which reformed the Hindu personal law and were passed in 1955–56: the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act.

Given the historical circumstances, it is clear that we cannot assess the different approach towards personal laws of different communities as an intended outcome of politics of recognition. Nehru himself considered the Hindu Code Bills as a "method of preparing the ground" for a Uniform Civil Code.[124] However, the reformation of Hindu personal law in the situation when the Muslim personal law remained intact was rather an abnormality in the creation of the Nehruvian secular republic, and brought some further frictions between the religious communities in the long run.

[122] The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937. Online: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1325952/
[123] Godbole, Madhav, *The God Who Failed*. 2014, pp. 126–127.
[124] Baird, Robert D. 2005. Religion and Law in India: Adjusting to the Sacred as Secular. In: Robert D. Baird, ed. *Religion and Law in Independent India*, 2nd ed. New Delhi: Manohar, p. 22.

The uniform civil code has been long demanded by the Hindu nationalists led by the RSS and the BJP, pointing at the alleged bias of the Congress government. For the Hindu nationalist forces, the Congress-led government was not secular but pseudo-secular, as it favours the Muslim and Christian communities whose personal laws have remained unchanged. The demand for the uniform civil code has become an integral part of the Hindu nationalist programme and appears in the BJP's election manifestos until today,[125] along with abolishing of the Article 370 of the constitution which gives autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the construction of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya. Thus, we can see a paradox when the secular law is demanded by the forces which are themselves tied with a community defined on the cultural-religious basis.

The critique of the Congress pseudo-secularism, however, proves valid after the death of Nehru in 1964. While Nehru considered religion as a private matter of each and every citizen and even sought to be blind to the differences between the religious and caste groups, his successors, headed by Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, exploited these differences as a political issue in order to secure their votebanks from various communities. In 1970s and 1980s, the Congress government asserts the Hindu identity of independent India,[126] while balancing the nationalist ideology by occasional compromises with the religious minorities.

4. 3 The end of the Congress system

The 1967 general elections saw the Congress defeated in seven federal states and losing power in some of the state governments the same year, and another electoral loss in the 1977 general elections. During this period, Congress gradually loses its privileged position on the political scene and slips to the authoritarian tendencies more often than before. After the secession of the Syndicate faction and creation of the Congress (Organisation) in 1969, the united opposition stood against the Congress for the first time in the next elections in 1971. Although Indira Gandhi, campaigning with the slogan of *garībī haṭāo* (remove poverty), was able to obtain the clear majority of 350 mandates out of 520, the "Congress system" never returned again.[127]

The split of the Congress signified also the end of democracy within the party and Congress

[125] See the *BJP Election Manifesto 2014*. Online: https://www.bjp.org/images/pdf_2014/full_manifesto_english_07.04.2014.pdf [2018/03/20]

[126] One must bear in mind that the Indian/Hindu nationalism was on the rise after the after the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, and especially during and after the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 when the Indian military intervened in the liberation war in East Pakistan, leading to the creation of the new independent state of Bangladesh.

[127] For an interesting insight to the restructuring of Indian party system from the position of consociational democracy, see Lijphart, Arend: The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Consociational Interpretation. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jun., 1996), pp. 258–268.

no more acts as a party of consensus. The power in the party became centralized in the hands of Indira Gandhi and her closest fellow partisans, creating the "pyramidal decision-making structure in party and government",[128] where the positions in the Congress organizations were filled by appointments from above rather than by elections from below.[129] The centralization, however, did not stop with the ruling party. The economic policy shifted more towards state socialism, and the welfare system changed as well: the welfare packages were now targeted towards particular groups of the population, such as scheduled tribes, religious minorities or women, and presented as a gift of the central government and especially Indira Gandhi in person. This populist strategy helped to reinforce the paradoxical alliance of the urban elites and rural landholding castes on the one side and lower castes and minorities on the other.[130]

The nature of the Indian democracy was also altered under Indira Gandhi: on the one hand, the perception of democracy has substantially changed and India has moved towards the Jacobin conception of direct popular sovereignty, with poor and oppressed groups becoming more aware of the significance of elections. On the other hand, Mrs Gandhi's rule led to greater populism and neglect of democratic rules and procedures.[131] While the elections became a vital instrument to gain legitimacy and the levels of democratic participation raised under Indira Gandhi, the meaning of democracy shrinked almost solely to the election procedure: once in power, the new generation of politicians did not care much about its responsible exercise.

4. 4 State of emergency

Despite the confirmation of Indira Gandhi's power both within the party and the government, the political scene was in the state of unrest, resulting into the massive strikes of railway workers in 1974, followed by widespread agitations against corruption in government, especially in Bihar and Gujarat. The protest, initially led by students, soon transformed into a popular anti-government movement. Under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan calling for "total revolution", the movement voiced the frustration of large sections of population and attracted virtually all the opposition parties except the Communists. After the Allahabad High Court found Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices, the opposition started to demand her resignation and Jayaprakash Narayan claimed that the government had lost all moral

[128] Kochanek, Stanley A.: Mrs Gandhi's Pyramid: The New Congress. In Hart, Henry C. (ed.), *Indira Gandhi's India*, Boulder: Westview, 1976, pp. 104–105.
[129] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): *State and Politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 101–102.
[130] Chatterjee, Partha, "Introduction: A Political History of Independent India." In: Chatterjee, Partha (ed.), *State and Politics in India*, p. 23.
[131] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, pp. 48–49.

credit to rule. As a reaction, Indira Gandhi promulgated a state of emergency in India on 25 June 1975. Although a 20-point programme including some social reforms and benefits to various sections of the people was declared only a week after, the emergency unleashed the authoritarian tendencies of the incumbent Prime Minister, leading to further centralization of the federal system, along with restricting some of the civic laws and arresting the opposition leaders. In January 1977, Indira Gandhi surprisingly announced the new parliamentary elections for March, which led to the unprecedented defeat of the Congress by the bloc of the Janata Party consisting of four opposition parties – the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Bharatiya Lok Dal and the Socialist Party. The aftermath of the elections saw the restoration of democracy, but also more conflicts between political parties and a desperate search for consensus. In this period, a huge number of Indian voters discover the logics of electoral politics and the principles of accountability of the elected deputies, which leads to the regular alternation in power. The Janata government, led by Morarji Desai, was also the first attempt for a coalitional cabinet, which nevertheless proved unsuccessful. The Janata coalition disbanded only after two years in power, and the general elections of 1980 were again swept by the Congress with a clear majority.

4. 5 Consolidation of the political pluralism

Although the Janata Party disintegrated after the lost elections, its regionally and religiously grounded member parties start to gain popularity. James Manor and Stanley Kochanek[132] identify four broader tendencies in Indian politics that revolve around certain sets of ideas: communist, socialist, non-confessional rightist and confessional rightist. All four of these tendencies were successfully occupied by the non-Congress parties in the 1980s, thus eroding the Congress electoral basis. The most interesting was the case of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which managed to gain legitimacy by its participation in the Janata government and thus to get rid of its label of far-right extremist party.[133] Transformed into the Bharatiya Janata Party,[134] the political offshoot of the Hindu nationalist movement was ready to start its raise to prominence in the 1980s.

The landslide victory in the 1980 elections ejected the Congress back to power without any self-correction and even amplified Indira Gandhi's tendencies for authoritarian reign. During this time, the Congres also renegotiated the two fundamental definitions of the Indian political

[132] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. In Chatterjee, Partha: *State and Politics in India*. 1998, p. 109.
[133] Chandra, Bipan, Mukherjee, Mridula, Mukherjee, Aditya: *India After Independence 1947–2000*. 2000, pp. 250–254.
[134] The BJP was oficially founded on 6 April 1980. Although it was technically a new party, it was a direct successor of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and its structure remained relatively intact, including a strong association with the RSS.

life – "the secular" and "the national". While the Nehru government was able to distinguish between cultural and economic demands of the rich farmers and bourgeoisie in the regions during the first phase of regionalization in the 1950s, Indira Gandhi's cabinet was much more hospitable to the regionalisms such as demands for the linguistic states or regional allocation of heavy industries. An even more important shift occurred in the state approach towards religious communities. While Nehru asserted the equality of all faiths where religion was perceived as a private matter of every citizen, this individualist approach was undermined under Indira Gandhi. By giving various concessions to the religious communities as communities and not as individuals, the perception of secularism gradually shifted from *dharma nirapekṣatā* to *sarva dharma sambhava* and the state started to understand itself not as secular, but rather multireligious. Thus, instead of the Nehruvian difference-blind approach which should treat all the people equally, the Indian state started to assert the multicultural attitude where the differences are recognized and fostered. These changes soon expanded to the public space: while during the Nehru era, the religious festival such as Diwali, Dussehra, Id or Christmas were celebrated without being noticed by the media, in the times of Indira Gandhi they entered the secular television broadcasting.[135]

After 1982, the Congress leaders even ceased to practice their former policy of reconciliation between the social groups, cultures and regions. In the early 1980s, the Congress adopted a confrontational attitude towards the National Conference Party in Kashmir and the Sikh extremists in Punjab to consolidate the Hindu votebank, a move appreciated even by the RSS.[136] In May 1983, Indira Gandhi wrote the letter to the members of the Council of Ministers, known as Prime Minister's "15-point programme on minorities" to combat the rise of communalism, but the proposed measures such as special courts for communal offences or recruiting minorities into the police forces effectively solved only the aftermaths of communal tensions, not their causes. In the realpolitik, facing the decline of popular support, the Congress even started to set the various communities against one another, thus capitalizing on their insecurity and obtaining the votes from both sides of the conflict. The voters from different groups actually often seen the Congress as the only party capable to create stability in the midst of political chaos – which Congress itself had wilfully helped to create. This strategy indeed secured some electoral voices for the ruling party, nevertheless proved harmful in the long run, as it eroded the liberal-secular basis of the Indian nationalism, and the

[135] Kaviraj, Sudipta: A Critique of the Passive Revolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23 (1988), No. 45/47, p. 2440.
[136] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): *State and Politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 111.

polarization of the electorate offered more opportunities for parties on the extremes of the political spectrum, such as the BJP.[137]

4. 6 Crisis in Punjab

The biggest problem of 1980s India, however, emerged in the form of the terrorist attacks of the militant Sikh separatists demanding the independent state of Khalistan. The attempts by the Sikh party *Shiromani Akali* Dal to arrange the compromise between the separatists and the government did not reach the desired result. After the militant religious leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers fortified themselves in the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, the Indian army launched the so-called Operation Blue Star to remove the extremists from the complex. After a week of shelling and killing not only the Sikh militants but also several hundreds of civilists, the Indian troops were able to gain the effective control of the temple in June 1984. The army action provoked nation-wide criticism, as the attack occurred during the Sikh religious holidays and the number of casualties thus increased. Instead of calming down the situation, the Prime Minister continued to focus on the broader Hindu public and opined that the Hindu culture is under threat of Muslims and Sikhs.[138] The tensions escalated after the Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards, which triggered a series of pogroms against Sikhs throughout India and especially in Delhi, often with complicity of the police. The riots were ended by the army intervention only after four days, leaving the official record of 2,732 deaths, while the unofficial number of deaths is estimated at about 8,000.

Congress continued in its appeal on the Hindu vote even after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the accession of her son Rajiv to the prime ministerial position. The landslide victory of the Congress party must not be understood solely as an effect of the sympathy wave after the death of the prime minister or of the expectations towards her young successor. Other crucial factors included the widespread feeling that the national unity is in danger, and related a Hindu backlash that was exploited and encouraged by the Congress.[139] The Sikh riots and subsequent elections epitomized a symbolic milestone in Indian politics, as the ruling party identified the Indian identity with the narrower Hindu unity for the first time, and the cultural and religious identities entered the public space as the primary topic of political discourse.

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[137] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. In Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): *State and Politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 119.
[138] Kothari, Rajni: *State against Democracy*. Delhi: Ajanta, 1988, p. 247.
[139] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): *State and Politics in India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 117.

4. 7 The Shah Bano case

The Congress party continued in its populist politics even after the 1984 elections. In 1985–1986, the Indian public was divided by the so-called Shah Bano case.[140] After being divorced by her husband Mohammed Ahmad Khan in 1978, Shah Bano Begum, a 62-year Muslim woman from Indore filed a criminal suit in the local court, asking for the right of alimony from her husband. As the court ordered Khan to pay the maintenance, he filed a petition claiming that Shah Bano is not his responsibility anymore, as he had a second wife which is also permitted under Islamic Law. After seven years, the litigation reached the Supreme Court. The judgement, given on 23 April 1985, decided that according to the section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Shah Bano should be given maintenance money.[141]

However, Ahmad Khan restorted to the Supreme court not because he could not afford the maintenance amounts prescribed by the court. As Upendra Baxi observes, the real meaning of the Shah Bano litigation was not an attempt to revoke the obligation to pay the alimony, but to reinstate the Sharia law.[142] After the judgment, the Muslim community felt threatened by a possible encroachment of the Muslim Personal Law, which is partially based on the Sharia law and thus permits unilateral divorce and polygamy, and protested against the judgment. The case was soon politicized and became a question of the rights of religious minorities to protect their cultural identity on the one side, and the impartiality of the secular state on the other. As the court explicitly regretted that the Article 44 of the Constitution about the uniform civil code had not come into practice, the debate concerned also the question of national integration.

In order to appease a Muslim community, which constituted its traditional vote bank, the Congress government decided to pass the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986[143] which altered the judgment of the Supreme Court and restricted the right to alimony for only 90 days after the divorce, which in the Islamic Law corresponds with the period of Iddah, i. e. three menstrual courses or three lunar months after the date of divorce. As a matter of fact, the decision of Rajiv Gandhi's government not only prioritized the Islamic personal law before the secular Indian legislation, but it also subordinated the rights of the individual to the rights of the community. The act received severe criticism not only from

[140] For a detailed account on the Shah Bano case, see Engineer, Asghar Ali: *The Shah Bano Controversy*. 1987.
[141] "Mohd. Ahmed Khan and Shah Bano Begum and Others". Supreme Court Reports. 1985. 3: 844. 23 April 1985. Online: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/823221/
[142] Baxi, Upendra. 1986. Text of observations made at a public meeting on the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights) Bill, 1986. Bombay, Hindustani Andolan.
[143] The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. Online: https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1933289/ [2018/03/20]

the Hindu nationalists, who called it another act of "appeasement" towards the Muslim minority, but also from the secular intelectuals. The act marked not only a violation both of the principle of neutrality and the principle of equidistance, but also a betrayal of women's rights.[144]

[144] Although the case was presented as a conflict between secularism and communalism or national integration and disruption, Veena Das derives another point from the judgement. Its real meaning must be rather seen as a question of whether powers of the state should be extended into the sphere of the family. In her view, the rights of subordinate groups such as women should be addressed on their own terms, so that they do not become a matter of contest between the state promoting national integration and community struggling for its cultural survival. See: Das, Veena: Communities as Political Actors: The Question of Cultural Rights. In Das, Veena: *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. 1995, pp. 84–117.

5. Alternative Science Movement

The political events at the end of the 1970s and beginning of 1980s left a considerable imprint on the Indian political thinking. Starting with the publication of article named "Counter-statement on Humanistic Temper" by Ashis Nandy,[145] a whole new generation of "non-modern" historians, political theorists, literary critics, feminists, environmentalists, and other scholars emerge in the early 1980s in India. The so-called "alternative science movement"[146] opposed the allegedly oppressive and homogenising values and institutions of enlightenment and "modernity" which are demonised as a source of current violence, oppression and exploitation.[147]

Largely referring to Mahatma Gandhi as an icon of opposition to modernity or a proponent of alternative modernity, the anti-modernist movement raised the themes of epistemic parity (considering modern science as only one among other possible ways of knowing), and populism (the right to live by one's own traditions) to criticize the Nehruvian "scientific temper".[148] These themes provided the ideological outfit for a multitude of new social, environmental and ecofeminist movements, and the intellectual debate produced a new generation of Indian postmodernist thinkers with a considerable impact not only in India, but also in the West.[149]

The "alternative science movement" was drawing its inspiration from multiple sources. First, there was a huge intellectual influence of Edward Said's pathbreaking 1978 book, Orientalism.[150] Following the post-structuralist approach of Michel Foucault, Said had argued that colonialism should not be seen only in terms of territorial conquest and economic exploitation, but rather as a wider phenomenon with deeper consequences. By importing the Western norms into colonized societies, colonialism constructs a new sense of what is real, normal, appropriate and good among the colonized people. In the Orientalist tradition, Said argues, the Orient is fictionally depicted as an irrational, psychologically weak, and feminized, non-European Other, which is negatively contrasted with the rational,

[145] Nandy, Ashis: Counter-Statement on Humanistic Temper, *Mainstream*, 10 October 1981, pp. 16–18.
[146] Guha, Ramachandra: The alternative science movement: An interim assessment. *Lokayan Bulletin*, Vol. 6 (1988), No. 3: 7–25.
[147] See Nandy, Ashis (ed.), *Science, Hegemony, and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (1989); Nandy, Ashis (ed.) Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias (1987); Alvares, Claude, *Science, Development and Violence* (1992); Sardar, Ziauddin, *The Revenge of Athena* (1988); Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive* (1988).
[148] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward.* 2003, p. 310.
[149] The group of anti-modernists includes from subaltern historians, such as Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Prakash or Dipesh Chakrabarty to literary critics, including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, feminists Chandra Tolpade Mohanty, Lata Mani, Gauri Vishwanath or Madhu Purnima Kishwar, and environmentalists like Vandana Shiva.
[150] Said, Edward: *Orientalism*. Western Conceptions of the Orient. 1978.

psychologically strong, and masculine West. This projection is further internalized by the colonized, which makes them susceptible for further control by the colonial powers.

Second, this Indian version of postmodernism stems from the Western postmodern influences, especially the works of Thomas Samuel Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, but also from the critiques of instrumental reason developed by the Frankfurt school and popularized by Theodore Roszak, Herbert Marcuse and Ivan Illich.

Last but not least, the scientific temper debate emerges in the conditions of the "total revolution" of Jayaprakash Narayan directed against Nehru's modernist-developmental (or rather Indira Gandhi's populist-authoritarian) conception of the modern Indian state, leading to the revival of a neo-Gandhian and neo-Hindu brand of indigenism.[151] The anti-modernist advocates of neo-Gandhianism thus served as the speakers of the Indian bourgeoisie, especially the provincial propertied classes which gained political power in the 1980s.[152]

The "alternative science movement" gradually took various forms, some of whose had larger impact on the Indian political philosophy. The proponents of the Subaltern studies, such as Partha Chatterjee, argued that the Indian anti-colonial and nationalist discourse is only a derivate of the colonial mindsed. In his view, both left-wing socialist such as Jawaharlal Nehru and right-wing religious nationalists such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay were only echoing the intelectual premises of the colonial discourse, which proclaim the superiority of modernity over traditional ways of living.[153]

The more radical critique of modernity, impersonated by Ashis Nandy,[154] accused the British imperialists for their "destruction of the unique gestalt of India",[155] which laid in the non-modern, part-classical, part-folk Hinduism. This destruction was conducted by the creation of secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order, supposedly non-secular, non-differentiated and non-dualist.[156] In his own utterly essentialist approach,[157] Nandy sees the categories as irrational, mythological or feminine not as a Western imposition, but as a very substance of the Indian mind. This allows him to gradually extend his criticism from the colonial powers to the Westernized Indian elites which were considered to bear all the

[151] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward. Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 326.
[152] Desai, Radhika: Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34 (1999), No. 12, p. 698.
[153] Chatterjee, Partha: *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* 1986.
[154] Nandy, Ashis: *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*. 1983.
[155] Nandy, Ashis: *The Intimate Enemy*. 1983, p. 73
[156] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward.* 2003, p. 227
[157] This anti-modernist essentialism at its strongest can be found namely in the works of Vandana Shiva, one of the leading figures of eco-feminism. Cf. Shiva, Vandana, 1988. Staying alive: Women, ecology and survival. London: Zed Press.

attributes inappropriate for the Indian ground reality, such as socialist, liberal, and – of course – secularist.

5. 1 Anti-secularist critique

During the 1980s, a considerable number of Indian intellectuals launched a critique of secularism, which can be perceived as a part of the larger anti-modernist fashion of the time. In their opinion, the ideology of separating religion from political life did not suit the Indian society. Secularism emerged, they argued, as a "gift of Christianity"[158] and Western culture imposed onto a deeply religious majority by a powerful Western-educated minority. Experiencing the anti-sikh riots in 1984 and growing tension between the Hindu and Muslim communities which emerged after the Shah Bano case, the eminent Indian scholars from the anti-modernist mould started to call for a reappraisal of the role of religion in the public sphere. Such perversion of religion that led to communal riots, they argued, was made possible only by the marginalization of religious faith caused by secularization.[159] It was again Mahatma Gandhi, who was given the status of the patron-saint of the anti-secularists, and who was pitted against the secular arch-enemy, Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi stood for an indigenous way of tolerance between religions emanating from within Hindu spirituality, while Nehru represented a Western-style secularism, a foreign invention daring to question the worldview of Hindu spirituality.[160]

5. 2 Secularism as a gift of Christianity?

The first influential critique of secularism came from the sociologist T. N. Madan, who doomed secularism as "the dream of a minority which wants to shape the majority in its own image, which wants to impose its will upon history but lacks the power to do so under a democratically organized polity."[161] In his view, Nehruvian secularism is not suitable for the Indian reality, as it cannot discharge its Christian origin. Secularism as an ideology, argues Madan, "has emerged from the dialectic of modern science and Protestantism, not from a simple repudiation of religion and the rise of rationalism."[162] Thus, secularism with its specific history constitutes an entire world-view that establishes a hierarchical relation between the secular and the religious and expels religion from public life. This is however impossible in India, where the hierarchy encompasses the secular within the religious. In all

[158] Madan, T. N.: Secularism in Its Place, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 46 (Nov., 1987), No. 4, pp. 753–754
[159] Madan, T. N.: Secularism in Its Place, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 46 (Nov., 1987), No. 4, p. 749.
[160] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward.* 2003, p. 78.
[161] Madan, T. N.: Secularism in Its Place, p. 748.
[162] Ibid., p. 754.

Indian tradition, including Buddhism and Sikhism, Madan argues, religion is always superior to the worldly, and the relationship between spiritual authority and temporal power is hierarchical.[163] Thus, the categories of religious and secular are inseparable in the South Asian religions, as the wordly power of the Kshatriya castes is subordinate to the spiritual authority of the Brahman priests in the traditional caste hierarchy:

> "It would seem that originally the two functions were differentiated, but they were later deliberately brought together, for the regnum (*kshatra*) could not subsist on its own without the sacerdotium (*brahma*) that provided its principle of legitimacy."[164]

The Western secularism is thus unsuitable for India and other societies where the separation of the "state" and the "church" is technically impossible, and it is futile to search for secular elements in the South Asian cultural tradition, as secular is always encompassed by the sacred.[165]

Madan criticizes Nehruvian secularism for being defined only negatively, ie. on the deny of religion and concetration solely on the economic development. On the other hand, Nehru is criticized for not being radical enough to instigate the social change by coercive powers, such as Atatürk or Lenin did.[166] At the end of the day, Nehru and other Indian secularists have gone only the half way, denying the legitimacy of religion in human life and society without changing the nature of society as such, thus provoking a reaction from the religious zealots.[167]

In Madan's opinion, there are two ways to combat interreligious conflict: Either keep religion in public life and use its resources of toleration, or reject the available form of secularism and find another one which would be more appropriate for the Indian context. However, Madan makes a similar mistake as the Indian secularists whom he wants to criticize, as he adopts the orientalist conception of South Asian religious traditions: they are "totalizing in character, claiming all of a follower's life, so that religion is constitutive of society."[168] Loyal to the anti-modernist tradition, Madan apparently consider the traditional society as a static one, without any development or even a sense of time passing, as "there are no fundamentalists or revivalists in traditional society."[169] Although not considering himself a cultural determinist,

[163] Interestingly, on the other place Madan compares the relationship to a family one: "What is more, the priest and the king are united, as husband is to wife, and they must speak with one voice." (Madan, T.N: Secularism in Its Place, p. 752)
[164] Madan, T. N.: Secularism in Its Place, p. 751.
[165] Ibid., p. 753.
[166] Ibid., p. 756.
[167] Ibid., p. 757.
[168] Ibid., p. 751.
[169] Ibid., p. 749.

Madan's critique falls in the trap of the orientalist cognitive framework of the "true" and "false" religions.[170] Contrary to the "true" religion, Hinduism had failed in separating the religious from the secular authority, and is thus unsuitable for the Western form of secularism. Given this condition, Madan cannot propose other solution then a different kind of secularism than the one which was hitherto practiced:

> "Secularism must be put in its place: which is not a question of rejecting it but of finding the proper means for its expression. In multi-religious societies, such as those of South Asia, it should be realized that secularism may not be restricted to rationalism, that it is compatible with faith, and that rationalism (as understood in the West) is not the sole motive force of a modern state. What the institutional implications of such a position are is an important question and needs to be worked out."[171]

However trivial this conclusion can sound, there is something peculiar in Madan's argument which he shares with the other anti-secularists: the refusal to acknowledge that the Indian version of secularism could not a blind adaptation of the Western model, but rather a genuinely Indian invention. If we admit this assumption, the problem of suitability of the secular idea could be approached from an entirely reverse perspective: What if it is not Westernization, but rather a flawed indigenization of the idea of secularism which is the source of the problem?[172]

5. 3 Faith versus ideology

Ashis Nandy's critique of secularism is more radical. In his perception, secularism has colonized the domain of ethnic and religious tolerance in India – a conceptual domain that should now be recovered.[173] Instead of imposing an alien idea of secularism on the Indian masses, the elite should explore the models of tolerance already present in South Asian traditions and "hope that the state systems in South Asia may learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, or Sikhism, rather than wish that ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of statecraft."[174]

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[170] De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*. 2015, p. 227.
[171] Madan: Secularism in its Place, p. 754.
[172] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward.* 2003, p. 81.
[173] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), p. 177.
[174] Ibid., p. 189

In Nandy's theory, each religion in India splits into two: religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology.[175] By faith he means religion as a way of life, a tradition which is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural, and dealing with the theory and experience of transcendence. Ideology, on the other hand, ignores such theories and experiences except when they can be used for political or socio-economic interests. Such religions-as-ideologies usually serve more as an identifier of populations on the basis of one or more texts which, rather than the ways of life of the believers, then become the final identifiers of the 'pure' forms of the religions.

The problem of the modern secular state is, Nandy argues, that it always prefers to deal with religious ideologies rather than faiths. South Asian societies, however, are so much infused by religion-as-faith that they are hardly compatible with the very secular idea which constrains religion from the public to the private sphere. Secularism, as Nandy argues, is not only unsuitable for the Indian society because it is an import from 19th century Europe. It is incompatible with the multi-religious South Asian societies due to the very fact that it has little to say about cultures, as it is "ethnophobic" and often "ethnocidal", because it only tolerates cultures if they accept the role of ornaments subordinate to the nation state.[176] In fact, the very aspects of modernity such as the state system, nationalism and bureaucracy are committing violence which secularism is unable to combat.[177] Inevitably, "if the religious way of life cannot find a normal play in public life, it finds distorted expression in fundamentalism, revivalism and xenophobia."[178]

However, as De Roover points out,[179] Nandy's distinction fails to make sense in the case of Semitic religions, as both Christianity and Islam operates with the scriptures containing "the Word of God". Thus, the ways of life of Christian and Islamic believers must by definition revolve around their submission to God's will, as expressed in their holy books. Although Nandy admits that the "two categories are not mutually exclusive; they are like two axes on which could be plotted the state of contemporary religions,"[180] in case of Christianity and Islam the two axes coincide: the deeper the faith of the believer, the closer he approaches the ideology.

[175] Ibid., p. 178.
[176] Ibid., p. 179.
[177] Nandy's assumption that only modernist projects must involve the use of violence is somehow doubtful, as violence is often considered as a basis for the creation of the state, be it a modern or a traditional one.
[178] Nandy, Ashis: The Twilight of Certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism and Other Masks of Deculturation, *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 1 (1998), No. 3, pp. 283–298., p. 167
[179] De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*. 2015, p. 228–230.
[180] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. In Bhargava, Rajeev (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*. 1998, p. 322.

Despite claiming universal ambitions, Nandy's distinction thus can be applicable only in the case of religions which do not necessary follow the dogmatic reading of their holy books. Nevertheless, as De Roover points out, the tragedy of Nandy's anti-secularism is that it "fails to draw on the resources of Indian culture, even where it explicitely aims to do so."[181] As the anti-secularists keep the European discourse about India as a descriptive framework (with only switching their viewpoint, considering everything "Oriental" as inherently benign), they are not able to go deeper to the pre-modern Indian traditions as a source of inspiration for alternatives to secularism. After all, as Sunil Khilnani points out, the Indian modes of cohabitation of various communities, at least in the early modern cities, did not work on the principle of toleration, but rather on the principle of mutual exclusion. Religious conflict was restrained not on the basis of active and mutual respect among practitioners of different religions, but rather on indifference and neglect.[182]

As Stanley J. Tambiah points out, there is also a very vague separation of the categories of "traditional" and "modern" in Nandy's texts. Moreover, this obscurity is present even in his distinction between faith and ideology: if we accept this duality, how come that the people anchored in traditional faiths get so easily drawn into ideological nationalist campaigns, which are effectively modernist? How the ordinary people, supposedly peaceful and tolerant, suddenly become hateful and violent?[183] This turn and its motivations are improperly explained neither in the anti-secularist movement, nor in the very anti-modernist tradition of thinking as its notable source of inspiration – if we go back to Gandhi's famous critique of Indian submission to the British in *Hind Swaraj*, we will see that a coherent account of the actors' motivations is absent.[184]

For this question, Nandy offers a sketchy answer: "Much of the fanaticism and violence associated with religion comes today from the sense of defeat of the believers, from their feelings of impotency, and from their free-floating anger and self-hatred while facing a world which is increasingly secular and de-sacralized."[185] This explanation, however, seems insufficient and unconvincing, especially in Nandy's case, as he simultaneously argues that

[181] De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*. 2015, p. 231.
[182] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 115.
[183] Tambiah, Stanley: The Crisis of Secularism in India. In Bhargava, Rajeev (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics*. 1998, p. 443.
[184] Gandhi's polarization of virtuous traditional and spoiled modern somehow darkens the realization of his utopian vision: apparently, the individuals already aware of the vices of the Western civilization are supposed to see through its facade and to discard the modern lifestyle – but what about those who have not experienced the temptations of modernity? If the pre-modern Indians were wise enough to refuse them *a priori*, why they had not done it already during the very first encounter with the West? Cf. Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909], pp 35–37. If the Indians were seduced by the glitter of modern civilization, does not it meal that they were *not* inherently morally strong?
[185] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), p. 185.

usually only the instigators of violent riots are modernized, while the ordinary people resist the violence and do not participate in the riots.[186]

Here we come to another weak point of Nandy's argument, which is his somehow unclear distinction between secularism and modernity. In his view, secularism comes in a package together with development, mega-science and national security,[187] and he works with this cluster of quite distinct phenomena in his further argumentation. Nandy argues that the modern nation-state has no means of ensuring that the ideologies of secularism, development and nationalism themselves will not act as faiths intolerant to others, which seems like a quite truist assertion, exaggerated by his claim that secularism has the same role as were the crusading and inquisitional acts of religious ideologies.[188]

Modernity is being criticized as the main vehicle of the transition from the more accomodating and pluralistic folk tradition of "religion-as-faith" to their exploitation by the modern concepts of nationhood, and ultimately by the revivalist movements.[189] In Nandy's perception, the communal nationalism, itself a product of modernity, has been evoked by another modern ideology, the Nehruvian secularism.[190] This leads Nandy even to a controversial assumption that "as India gets modernized, religious violence is increasing." This is a completely ahistorical argument without any evidence. True, there indeed was an increase in religious violence during the time since Independence, but it is misleading to ascribe them to the vices of modernization for several reasons. First, increase in religious violence in a long-time perspective more or less correlates with population growth, and therefore the occurrence of violent encounters between people remains relatively stable. Second, even if the religious violence was really increasing in the 1980s when Ashis Nandy wrote his critique, this growth had an abrupt character and therefore cannot be seen solely as a consequence of modernization, which is supposed to be a continual process. And finally, this sudden increase of religious violence occurred in the period when the Indian state was going through a deep crisis of legitimacy and the secular practice degenerated into a meaningless buzz-word.[191]

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[186] Nandy, Ashis: The twilight of certitudes: Secularism, Hindu nationalism and other masks of deculturation. In: *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 1 (1998), No. 3, p. 160.
[187] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), p. 185.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Bilgrami, Akeel: Two Concepts of Secularism: Reason, Modernity and Archimedean Ideal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29 (Jul. 9, 1994), No. 28, p. 1751.
[190] In Nandy's enjoyable way of writing, the RSS is even dubbed an "illegitimate child of Western colonialism". Cf. Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), p, 187.
[191] Cf. Basu, Amrita: *Violent Conjunctures in Democratic India*. 2015, p. 2.

Another claim of the anti-modernists holds that secularism was an alien imposition upon the people who never wanted to separate the religion from politics in their everyday life, and that the expulsion of religion from the public sphere left people with no other choice than turning to the only religious politics available within the modern state, which was the Hindu nationalism. There is something appealing about this argument. However, as Akeel Bilgrami points out, "its explanatory virtues are greatly marred by its narrowing and uncritical anti-nationalism, its skewed historiography, and its traditionalist nostalgia."[192] Nandy makes great dialectical use of the fact that Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist, arguing that Gandhian pluralist version of Hinduism posed a threat to the elitist pseudo-unification of Hinduism pursued by the upper castes under the banner of the orthodox brahmanical culture. However, he tends to omit the fact that even Gandhi also used Brahmanical Hindu symbols to mobilize mass nationalism.[193] There is also a frequent tendency to forget that even Gandhi's conception of Indian nation was largely drawing on the Western sources (from Bible to Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy), although evoking the traditional Indian vocabulary, and to construct Gandhi as a "non-western" thinker with virtually no touch of Enlightenment philosophy.[194]

In their fascination by Gandhian thoughts, Nandy and other anti-secularists are easily seduced by the frequent anti-modernist romantic fallacy.[195] Their populist approach views the "traditional" Indian village as a harmonious unit without any internal conflict or external exploitation.[196] The paradox of this view is that it inherently nationalist, as it is evident from famous Gandhi's quote that "every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization even as a child clings to the mother's breast."[197] In this discourse, Western colonialism and industrialism can be blamed for any problem of the contemporary society and the pure Indian village can serve as the chief myth of the authoritarian nation.[198] In this point, we can see

[192] Bilgrami, Akeel: Two Concepts of Secularism: Reason, Modernity and Archimedean Ideal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29 (Jul. 9, 1994), No. 28, p. 1751.
[193] Ibid.
[194] See Chatterjee, Partha: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society. In: Guha, Ranajit (ed.): *Subaltern Studies III*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 153–195.
[195] See especially Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909], p. 57–58. "We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. (...) And where this cursed modern civilization has not reached, India remains as it was before."
[196] In the Gandhian and anti-modernist tradition, there is also a strong grip of the "fallacy of the romantic environmentalist", as Ramachandra Guha calls it. See Guha, Ramachandra, *How Much Should a Person Consume?* Permanent Black, Ranikhet 2006, pp. 239–240.
[197] Gandhi, M. K.: *Hind Swaraj*. 2014 [1909], p. 59
[198] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward.* 2003, p. 709

again the convergence of anti-modernism with the Hindu nationalism which it is supposed to criticize.

Another interesting thing on Nandy's argument is the fact that in the end, he comes to a slightly tautological conclusion that secularism *is* a possible counter-ideology to the riots perpetuated by the semi-modern zealots, ie. the very same group that secularism and modernity helps to create.[199]

Table 1. Classification of violence

Sectors involved	Typical violence	Model for violence	Locus of ideology	Nature of motives	Effective counter-ideology
Non-modern, peripheralized believers	Religious war	Traditional sacrifice (of self or other)	Faith	Passion	Internal critiques of faith/agnosticism
Semi-modern zealots	Riot	Exorcism/ search for parity	State	Passion and interest	Secularism
Modern, secular rationalists	Manufactured riots or 'assembly' line violence	Experimental science (vivisection), industrial management	Hegelian or Bismarckian concept of state	Interest	Critiques of objectification and desacralization

In Nandy's dichotomy between "tradition" and "modernity" (the former uniformly humane, the latter inherently oppressive), the tolerant religious practices were undermined by the ideological religious counstructions and institutions of modernity – in case of Hinduism, the Brahmanical ideology of Hindutva. However, such historiography with vaguely defined era of "modernity" hides the fact that all Brahmanical elements reinforcing the hegemony of upper castes were present in India well before the coming of modern institutions.[200] Thus, in the examination of the allegedly active role of secular state in forming the unified Brahmanical version of Hinduism seems to be a false track, and the principal question should rather be

[199] Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988), pp. 189–190.
[200] Bilgrami, Akeel: Two Concepts of Secularism: Reason, Modernity and Archimedean Ideal. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29 (Jul. 9, 1994), No. 28, p. 1752.

what new complexion the Brahmanical Hinduism acquired in colonial and post-colonial India.[201]

5. 4 From secularism-as-faith to secularism-as-ideology?

We will try to elaborate the answer to this question in following chapters, as the anti-secularist argument deserves our further attention. Interestingly, we can use the very methodology of Ashis Nandy of religion-as-faith and religion-as-ideology to *defend* the secular idea, if we extend the notion of faith outside the domain of religion. As Sunil Khilnani points out, the primary meaning of "faith" is "trust or confidence, unshakeable belief or conviction". Thus, religion is not the only foundation upon which one can build moral and ethical projects, in both private and public life.[202]

Nehru himself considered organised religions "a blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation"[203] and his strong disbelief in the religion-as-ideology was almost palpable. On the other hand, his faith was anchored in deep belief in the power of reason and the processes of reasoning. Similarly to Tagore and Gandhi, Nehru understood that in India, religious faith existed in multiple forms, no particular religion or belief system could claim universal commitment, and thus religion in its traditional sense could not claim a universal status. Both Tagore and Gandhi recognized that no religion in its traditional sense could serve as the basis of a universal faith or morality. Thus, while Gandhi sought to incorporate the elements of virtually all religious traditions present in India to create his own ethics, Tagore aimed at looking beyond religion and creating his own humanist faith in the capacities of man and belief in the transcendent powers of art and aesthetics.[204] Nehru, on the contrary, tried to develop a morality completely without religion, using the reason and processes of reasoning not only as an instrument by which to achieve goals, but also as a powerful resource for creating one's moral imagination.[205]

Further elaborating Khilnani's argument, we can thus assert that in the original Jawaharlal Nehru's perception, secularism could have worked as a true religion-as-faith, which was eventually transformed into the religion-as-ideology after his death. Secularism became more an instrumental doctrine of the state, functioning as a legitimating cloak for the modernist élite, further corroding the faith in society.[206] It is not a mere coincidence that the word

[201] Ibid., p. 1753.
[202] Khilnani, Sunil: Nehru's Faith. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37 (2002), No. 48, p. 4793
[203] Nehru, Autobiography, p. 374
[204] Khilnani, Sunil: Nehru's Faith. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37 (2002), No. 48, p. 4795.
[205] Ibid., p. 4793.
[206] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 180–181.

"secular" was inserted into the Preamble of the Constitution only by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency period in 1976.[207]

5. 5 Tragedy of anti-secularism

Despite of their harsh critique of secularism, the anti-secularists were not able to dismantle the very secularist framework of the Indian public discourse. Although criticizing the Hindu conservative forces, their critique was anchored in the very same sources and was not able to step out of the box of romantic revivalism and offer more powerful critique of the secularist model. Similarly to the Hindu nationalists, the anti-secularists to a great extent repeat the "inversion of orientalist epistemology"[208] which was common among 19th century Indian reformers, intellectuals, and politicians – i. e. interiorizing the orientalist construction of the East and the West as essentially different, only reversing the valuation to promote the supposed Indian traditional values. On the other hand, their rejection of the very legitimacy of the "scientific temper" led to further undermining of the Nehruvian scientific and rational approach to the world, which provided the Hindu nationalist movement further ammunition for the following years – especially by reinforcing the Hindu, Brahmanical and irrationalist identity of India's bourgeois ruling class at the expense of formerly shared ideas of liberalism, rationalism and developmentalism.[209] One can even see the postmodernist new social movements and Hindu nationalism as siblings born out of the same circumstances of the „total revolution" of the mid-1970s.[210]

As we will see in the following chapters, secularism has remained the pivotal national idea of India, but its status has been further undermined: from the one side by the very Indian state further corrupting the original Nehruvian idea, from the other side by the communal passion of the Hindu nationalists. The Hindu nationalist movement, however, should not be seen as a result of flawed secularism, but rather as a violent attempt to counter the efforts to undermine Brahmanical hegemony and the illusion of a unified Hindu society by adopting the politics of affirmative action in favour of the backward castes.

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[207] *The Constitution of India* (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976. Online: https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-forty-second-amendment-act-1976 [2018/03/20]
[208] Hansen, Thomas Blom: *The Saffron Wave*. 1999, pp. 67–69.
[209] Desai, Radhika, Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva. Economic and Political Weekly, March 20, 1999, pp. 695–712.
[210] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward. Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 327

6. The rise of the Hindu nationalism

As we mentioned earlier, the Nehruvian secular-socialist pattern of Indian identity was doing quite well in the first years after Independence. However, soon after Nehru's death his ideal of unity in diversity was corroded by more exclusivist ideas of India and of political community. The most powerful alternative to Nehru's concept is represented by the Hindu nationalist movement, which came into sight in the 1980s. Rejecting both the Gandhian and Nehruvian versions of the universalistic view of the Indian nation, the Hindu nationalists raise a claim for a state in which Hinduism should enjoy a hegemonic role.

Largely drawing from the work of V. D. Savarkar,[211] Hindu nationalism can be defined as an attitude of the Hindus, who are proud of their culture and belief, and seek to create a Hindu identity that would integrate all the different trends within Hinduism, which is rather a broad range of a large number of spiritual beliefs and cults than a codified religion. The first attempts to unite the Hindu society were made in late 19th century, but the real emergence of Hindu nationalism as a social phenomenon could be seen as late as in the 1920s. [212]

The first phase of the Hindu nationalist development, lasting until the early 1970s, was a period of slow, but stable development and growth. During this years, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) expanded from a small regional association to a nationwide volunteer organization, and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) was founded in 1964 to provide the movement with an ideological authority. Thus, in the second phase, which began with the student campaigns leading up to the Emergency in 1975, the Hindu nationalists were already able to massively claim their demands and visions. After the end of the Emergency and the electoral loss of the Congress, the Jana Sangh gained visibility as a member of the Janata government. In the third phase of the Hindu nationalist development, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), formed in 1980 as a successor of the Jana Sangh, became a fixed part of the Indian party system. Criticizing its "pseudo-secularism" and socialism, BJP started to present itself as a political alternative to the Congress. Backed by the other Hindu organizations, it also started to promote the Hindu nationalism on the political scene.

6. 1 The origins of the Hindu nationalism

Although largely drawing on the European tradition of ethnic or organic nationalism, the Hindu nationalism is rather an ethno-religious concept, which merges the notions of common

[211] Savarkar, V. D., *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* 1969 [1923]. For the analysis of Savarkar's conception of Hindutva, see Chapter 2.
[212] For the origins of Hindu nationalism, see Zavos, John: *The Emergence of Hindu nationalism in India*.2000.

territory, ethnic descent, and cultural and religious belonging. It can be defined as an attitude of the Hindus, who are proud of their culture and belief, and seek to create a Hindu identity that would integrate all the different trends within Hinduism. As Hinduism is rather a broad range of a large number of spiritual beliefs and cults than a codified religion, it often revolves around the strong and well-known symbols common for all the people calling themselves Hindus, such as protection of cows and holy places.

There is not much new in this concept. The first attempts to unite the Hindu society were made as soon as in the 19th century by the Hindu reformists such as Ram Mohan Roy, who rejected polytheism and casteism and promoted the Hindu unity, seeking the real essence of Hinduism in the Vedas and Upanishads. This was later followed by the process of "semitization" of Hinduism, notably by the Arya Samaj founded by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. Opposing the Christian proselytization, English education and Muslim influence, Dayananda saw the reason of purported weakness of Hinduism to resist these influences in its disorganisation and fragmentation, and suggested the reform on the basis of the four Vedas as the holy books to emulate the Semitic monotheist faith such as Islam and Christianity. This effort can be seen as a broader part of the inversion of orientalist epistemology. An important instrument to achieve this goal was the *shuddhi* movement which aimed at "purification" of the faith, attempted to stop conversions of lower-caste Hindus to Islam and Christianity and worked on reconverting the already converted Christians and Muslims back to Hinduism.[213]

This doctrine attracted Hindu reformists and revivalists from various regions, but the real emergence of Hindu nationalism as a social phenomenon could be seen as late as in the 1920s. At this time, the ideology of Hindu nationalism crystalises as an opposition against two different ideologies: the Muslim Khilafat movement on the one side, and Gandhi's principles of non-violent action on the other one. Rejecting non-violence as a legitimate form of protest against the British rule, Hindu nationalism starts its progress exactly at the time when the Indian National Congress grows into a mass movement.[214] This is not a mere coincidence. As the first RSS leaders were the Brahmans from Maharashtra belonging to the middle class, they perceived the Gandhian mobilisation of the lower strata of the Indian society as a threat to their social position.[215] This is also the reason why the Hindu nationalist movement never gained a larger support than the Gandhian (but also Nehruvian) movement tied with the Indian National Congress, and the BJS/BJP as its political offshoot was confined to a relatively stabe electoral support not exceeding 10% for a long time: as a movement with a

[213] Ibid., pp. 71–72.
[214] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*. 1996, p. 46.
[215] Nandy, Ashis, *At the Edge of Psychology. Essays in Politics and Culture*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 76–78.

clear high-caste and middle-class profile, it was not able to attract support from the lower castes. In fact, Hindutva served as an ideology only for this specific section of Indian population until the 1980s.

6. 2 Convergence with neo-Gandhism

The rise of the Hindu nationalist movement to prominence starts in the mid-1970, together with the student protests in Bihar and later Gujarat, which soon transformed into a larger social movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan – a veteran Gandhian socialist who agreed to return to the political scene mainly because he had seen in the student movements in Gujarat and Bihar a chance to rehabilitate certain Gandhian priorities. The very concept of "total revolution" was ideologically rather vague, but it can be defined as a complete reform of society inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, such as the abolition of untouchability and subsequently caste, rehabilitation of politics at the local level through *panchayats*, and also rehabilitation of village-based cottage industries.[216] His call for total revolution, or "a struggle against the very system which has compelled almost everybody to go corrupt,"[217] proved to be attractive enough for all the forces opposing the Congress – both the Hindu nationalists from the right and the anti-imperialist intellectuals and activist from the left. Jayaprakash Narayan thus managed to transform the student movement against the populist-authoritarianist regime of Indira Gandhi into a kind of referendum against the modernization politics of the Congress party since Independence.[218]

The unprecedent turmoil initiated by the student movement in Bihar did not happen all of a sudden. The coming of neo-Gandhism in the 1970s was evoked by the deep political and economic crisis, but also by the transformation of the rural middle-class landholders into a capitalist class.[219] Jayaprakash Narayan's vision of a slightly modified Gandhian traditionalism appeared to fit the worldview of this newly emerging social group, which was simultaneously perceived as a potentially new electoral base by the Hindu conservatives. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, the alliance between the Gandhians and the Hindu nationalists was (and is) not purely opportunistic, because both groups share the rural, Hindu traditionalist outlook. The movement for "total revolution" was largely supported by the RSS cadres, and Jayaprakash Narayan himself had showed sympathy towards the RSS

[216] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics. 1996*, pp. 260–266.
[217] Cited in Chandra, Bipan, Mukherjee, Mridula, Mukherjee, Aditya: *India After Independence 1947–2000*. 2000.p. 248
[218] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward. Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, p. 315.
[219] Desai, Radhika (1999): "Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 12, p. 698.

organization well before the actual movement gained momentum.[220] At the same time, the revival of Gandhian thoughts as an alternative to the Congress populism gave birth to the new social movements of the left. Thus, as Meera Nanda observes, the alternative science movements and the Hindu nationalists are "twins, born of the same events and carrying forth the same traditionalist social agenda."[221]

6. 3 Ideology and imagery

One of the main features of the Hindu nationalists is their unquestionable skill in spreading their ideas and manipulating the masses. Some of the secular intellectuals even consider the Hindu nationalist campaign to be a product of cynical manipulation by political leaders.[222] This is a quite simplified perception, but the expansion of the Hindutva ideology among the public which took place at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s was an incredibly fast action concerning a large part of the Indian population, directed by a quite small-scale group of the Hindu nationalists.[223]

As Hinduism is rather a broad range of a large number of spiritual beliefs and cults than a clearly articulated religious doctrine, the Hindu nationalists need something to unite these beliefs into one current. This role is played by the various images and icons, which are clearly understandable for all the Hindus. Among the most frequent visual images, we can find for example the picture of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India), widely displayed on the webpages of the BJP or VHP, or the lotus flower, symbol of the BJP. The mobilizing campaigns of the VHP are centred not only on the Hindu temples, but also on protection of the cows, the sacred animal of all Hindus. Like many extremist movements worldwide, the VHP as an intellectual think-tank of the Hindu nationalist movement needs a worthy adversary to justify its dichotomizing strategy of confrontation. As we have already seen, this role is played primarily by the Muslims, who are portrayed as children of the aggressive conquerors, responsible for the deeds of their ancestors. BJP tries to distance itself from the demonizing of Muslims and the aggressive VHP formulations. But its politics could be still denominated as

[220] Jaffrelot, Christophe, The Hindu Nationalist Movement, pp. 258–266.
[221] Nanda, Meera: *Prophets Facing Backward*. 2003, p. 314.
[222] Basu, Amrita: Mass Movement or Elite Conspiracy? The Puzzle of Hindu Nationalism. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 55.
[223] This part is partly drawing from my paper "Building European Identity: India as a Model?" presented at the international conference "*European, National and Regional Identity*", Oradea, 24–26 March 2011.

Hindu populism, criticising the Indian National Congress for its politics of "appeasement" with the Muslims.[224]

Although the decolonization from the British supremacy saw the creation of the explicitly Muslim state of Pakistan in the areas with the Muslim majority and a following population exchange between Pakistan and India, not all the Indian Muslims chose to change their home and remained citizens of India. After the detachment of Pakistan, the Muslim share of India's population decreased from approximately 25 per cent to 10 per cent. However, during the independent years the Muslim share have risen, nowadays constituting more than 13.4% of the country's population and providing India with the third largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia and Pakistan. In addition, this percentage still rises, as the Indian Muslims have a higher fertility rate compared to that of other religious communities in the country.

In the Gandhian and Nehruvian concepts of Indian identity, the Muslim minority has been always treated as an integral part of Indian nation. Although the Muslims had formerly come to India as invaders, they gradually adjusted themselves to the Indian culture and became a part of the Indian nation. In addition, they came in comparatively small numbers and they did not disturb the culture and the institutions of the country.[225] As most of the Muslims in India belong to Indian ethnic groups, the rule of Muslim dynasties was accompanied by conversions to Islam, which usually took place as a means of seeking greater social mobility and higher social status. However, since most Indian Muslims have converted from Hinduism, they often retained the same caste and the same occupation. In the end, the egalitarian Islam adapted itself even to the inequalities of the Indian caste system and became an integral part of the synthetic Indian culture. In daily life, however, the Muslim minority faces a considerable level of marginalization. The Muslims form a considerable part of the urban poor, their literacy rate ranks well below the national average and Muslim poverty rates are only slightly higher than low-caste Hindus. According to the popular stereotypes, they are often portrayed as an antithesis to the Indianness, even if they consider themselves as proud members of the Indian nation.

[224] Apart from the Muslims, the Christian converts have also been a frequent targets of the Hindu nationalists. This tendency re-occured after Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow of Italian descent, became the leader of the Congress. In the late 1990s, the VHP started an aggressive campaign against the Christians, while the BJP embarked on this anti-Christian trend in a moderate way through the critique of Sonia Gandhi as a foreigner unfamiliar with the reality of Indian politics.

[225] Nehru, J.: Psychology of Indian Nationalism [1927]. In Iyengar, U. (ed.): *The Oxford India Nehru*. 2007, pp. 95–106.

6. 3. 1 Awakening of the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement

The mobilization of the Hindu nationalist forces was largely facilitated by the reluctance of the Congress government to preserve the secular values in the public space, which even provided the Hindu nationalist with a new iconographic symbol. During the 1980s, the Indian television was to a great extent used as a tool for cultural engineering and electoral gains through creation of an "Indian" national character closely identified with the ruling Congress party. This policy included also the Hindu legitimacy and Hindi supremacy that would be convenient to the Indian, mainly Hindu, middle classes.[226] Although in fact Hindu rituals vary from region to region, in Doordarshan programmes they have been presented in a standardized form, thus marginalizing other religious practices and producing a hegemonic "Hindu-Hindi" national cultural identity. On the other hand, given the nation's demography, a certain predominance of Hindu-oriented music, reporting, and language has been inevitable. On the whole, however, radio and television still reflected the Congress Party's traditional official policy of communal harmony.

The most defining event, which definitely changed the relations between media, politics and society, was the serialization of two Hindu epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, on state-controlled television. Ramayana was broadcast on Sunday mornings from 25 January 1987 to 31 July 1988, meeting a great acceptation from the audience. It is estimated that during the relations, 90 per cent of the TV sets in India were on.[227] The Ramayana broadcast was intended as another Congress attempt to consolidate the Hindu vote and form the Hindu-Hindi identity. However, it brought a completely different outcome. The Rama-related imagery was appropriated by Hindu nationalist leaders of the Sangh Parivar and helped to consolidate the forces of the Hindu nationalist movement.[228]

The serialization of the Ramayana on Doordarshan has helped to the project of Hindu fundamentalism, creating a shared symbolic lexicon around which political forces could mobilize communal praxis. The production also fed indirectly into the current of Hindutva by promoting a North Indian standardised version of the Ramayana epic which marginalised tribal and regional variants. Iconography of Rama in popular posters has also changed: after the Doordarshan series, the god started to be depicted more often as a militant warrior with a bow than other iconographic possibilities. And it also raise the religious consciousness of the

[226] FARMER, Victoria L.: Mass Media: Images, Mobilization, and Communalism. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996,. p. 106.
[227] MARTIN-KESSLER, Florence, "L'audiovisuel: Radio et télévision." In: JAFFRELOT, Christophe (ed.), *L'Inde contemporaine de 1950 à nos jours*. Paris: Fayard; CERI, 2006. p. 738.
[228] See Rajagopal, Arvind, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001.

population. For example, after Doordarshan's Ramayana and BJP mobilizations, more people can define Ayodhya preciesly as a town in Uttar Pradesh.[229]

6. 3. 2 Rama versus Babar

In 1984, in a Dharam Sansad (Assembly of Faith) in Delhi, the VHP adopted the goal of "liberating" temple sites occupied by the Muslims in North India as a means to achieve Hindu consolidation. As the initial focus of its efforts, the Ramjanmabhoomi in Ayodhya – the alleged birthplace of the mythic king Rama, where the mosque had been built during the rule of the Mughal emperor Babar – was singled out. In such circumstances the serialisation of the Ramayana was very useful. Some critics even assume that the broadcast of the epics was linked with the strategy of Rajiv Gandhi's government to 'liberate' Ram's alleged birthplace by unlocking the Babri mosque which stood on the disputed site and to conciliate the rising influence of the BJP by this means.[230] But the real effect was completely opposite: the promotion of Ram iconography was soon appropriated by the BJP.

Due to the broadcasting of the Ramayana, the Hindu nationalist agitation for the Ramjanmabhoomi liberation achieved a wide following within the nation. The campaign for the Rama Temple transformed the marginal VHP into a major religious-cultural organization, and generated considerable electoral gains for the BJP. While in the former elections the BJP enjoyed about 8 per cent support, usually gaining around 20 seats in the Lok Sabha, the 1989 elections signified a breakthrough. The BJP polled 11,5 per cent of the vote, gaining 86 seats in the assembly of 544 members.

As the key initiative of the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign, the *rath yatra* (chariot march) was launched in autumn 1990 in Somnath by the BJP. It was to be undertaken across nine states and would culminate at Ayodhya on 30 October 1990, the proposed day for the construction of the new Rama temple in Ayodhya by the VHP. The aim of the rath yatra was to publicise the Ramjanmabhoomi issue and also to take some air out of the government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report. The choice of Somnath in Gujarat was not random. It had an emblematic meaning as the site of the most famous episode of Muslim temple-destruction in India in the 11th century. Moreover, the ruined temple was rebuilt in 1950 and from the BJP view, this event represent a symbol of Hindu dominance in Gujarat. During the campaign, the BJP continued to exploit the symbols offered by the Doordarshan

[229] FARMER, Victoria L.: Mass Media: Images, Mobilization, and Communalism. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 103.

[230] Hasan, Zoya: Communal Mobilisation and Changing Majority in Uttar Pradesh. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996,. p. 92.

series. For example, the design of the BJP chariot was based on the design for Arjun's chariot in the Mahabharata.[231]

The serialization of Ramayana violated a Nehruvian taboo of the secular and non-partisan status of government institutions and largely contributed to the awakening of the religious feelings and claims.[232] Facing the erosion of its electoral basis, Congress abandoned its original difference-blind approach in the area of official state propaganda and started to address the public as the members of separate religious communities. Although probably intended as an attempt to redefine the Indian public as predominantly Hindu, this effort to awake the Hindu sentiments backfired on Rajiv Gandhi's government, as it provided a means to consolidate the Hindus by the genuine Hindu political forces. The BJP, formerly an insignificant electoral force, could establish itself as a major national party, while the VHP expanded from an insignificant group to a nationwide organization. Followed by perfectly mastered campaigns of the RSS and VHP, this failure of the Congress government to preserve the secular values led to the rise of the Hindu nationalism as one of the main features of contemporary Indian politics.

[231] Davis, Richard H.: The Iconography of Rama's Chariot. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 28.
[232] Rajagopal, Arvind, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001. p. 81–86.

7. Politicisation of OBCs after Mandal Affair: Towards Social Justice, or Identity Politics?

> Caste system provided the political leadership with readymade channels of communication and mobilisation and, in view of this, the importance of caste was bound to increase in Indian politics. What caste has lost on the ritual front, it has more than gained on the political front.[233]

On 23 October 1990, Lal Krishna Advani, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, was arrested in Bihar by the chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav during his political campaign. This incident happened only a few months after the Indian government led by Janata Dal under prime ministership of V. P. Singh announced to imply the recommendations of Mandal Commission, reserving 27% seats in government services for the "Other Backward Classes". Arrested on his tour with a clear intention to mobilize the Hindu electorate, Advani's detention can be perceived almost in a symbolic manner: we can see how the upper-caste politician from the Centre was stopped by the local leader who was himself an OBC, showing thus the assertion of the lower castes and regionalization of the North Indian politics.

The Mandal Commision recommendations and their acceptance by the V. P. Singh government in 1989 constituted an important milestone in the Indian political history. Although originally addressing an issue of social justice, it became a substantial feature of identity politics in India. Naturally, there have been many arguments for and against the implementation of Mandal recommendations. This chapter, however, does not aim on assessing the effect of the OBC reservations on the social justice in contemporary India. Instead, it concentrates primarily on the methodological issues of identifying backwardness and the effect of implementation of the Mandal Commission report on the Indian politics and society.

As a number of commentators have noted, the spread of democracy and democratic institutions across India has reinforced rather than undermined the importance of caste.[234] Caste not only continues to be a significant feature of Indian society, but also an important pattern of group mobilisation on the political scene. Given these conditions, can we consider the implementation of the OBC reservations as another step of deepening democracy, or a destabilisation of the political system? Did the acceptance of Mandal report help to create a

[233] (1980) Government of India: Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 62.
[234] See Kothari, R. (ed.) (1970) Caste in Indian politics. London: Sangam; Srinivas, M. N. (ed.) (1996) Caste: its Twentieth Century Avatar. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

new cleavage in Indian politics and society, or was it only a logical resumption of the process mentioned above?

7. 1 Recognition and identity politics in India

In the effort to preserve the multi-cultural mosaic of India, the architects of the Indian constitution deviated from the 19th century liberalism which traditionally refused political representation of cultural differences. Unlike the contemporary Western democracies, Indian Constitution adopted not only liberal assumption of individual autonomy and liberty, but also autonomy to each religious community to pursue its own way of life. Being more sensitive to community distinctions, the Indian policy-makers somehow preceded the political discourse of second half of the 20th century, creating the Indian version of politics of recognition.

However, there are two lines of critique of this approach. The liberal one argues that the Indian politics of recognition views individuals primarily as members of particular social groups, and the collective rights were not preceded by a uniform structure of social and civil laws. Marginalisation of the individual by the priority of community rights and pursuit of equality between groups only undermines the possibility of equality between individuals within the groups.[235] Thus, the politics of recognition based on groups in Indian society leads to a polity "diverse in our unities" rather than "united in diversity".[236] The priorities to community rights also triggered a process of further fragmentation and polarization of the Indian society, when sects within the communities started seeking a minority status. The number of minorities steadily increased and India gradually became a society of minorities.[237]

The second line of critique is associated with traditional Marxism. It says that the proponents of identity model of recognition neglect the material economic bases of inequality and misrecognition. Their claim for recognition and equality is associated mainly with the cultural harms and differences, narrowing the recognition into identity politics based on primordial sentiments and encouraging separatism and group enclaves. Moreover, they drastically simplify the group identities, denying the complexity of people's lives and multiplicity of their identifications.[238]

While the first argumentation could be more useful in case of religious minorities, we can adopt the second one to criticise the issue of reservations for Other Backward Classes. Similarly to the case of cultural and religious minorities, the Indian policy-makers adopted the essentialist view of caste as "the basic unit of social organisation of Hindu society" and "the

[235] By justifying community laws, the cultural autonomy has tended to perpetuate discrimination in minority groups, particularly in the issues of gender equality.
[236] Mehta, P. B. (2003). The burden of democracy. New Delhi: Penguin Books, p. 15.
[237] Mahajan, Gurpreet (1998) Identities and Rights, Delhi: Oxford University Press., p. 13
[238] Fraser, Nancy (2000) 'Rethinking recognition'. *New Left Review*, 3, pp. 107–120.

only readily and clearly 'recognisable and persistent collectivities'."[239] This perception has helped to create a new form of identity politics with caste as its central element.

However, caste can not be considered as a frozen social identity. The modernisation and social change has brought the process of secularisation of caste, consisting of two dimensions. The first one is de-ritualisation, during which is caste unlinked from various forms of rituality, such as specific rules of commensality and endogamy. With this erosion of rituality, caste loses its original ideological, economic and political contexts and ceases to be a unit of the ritual-status hierarchy. It survives as a kinship-based cultural community, but operates in a different, newly emergent system of social stratification. This process is complemented by politicisation of castes, which incorporates castes in competitive politics and reorganises the hierarchy and separation in larger social collectivities.[240] These two processes, somehow antagonistic in their nature, have altered the meaning of caste in contemporary India.

7. 2 Who are the Other Backward Classes?

Although Constitution itself speaks about Backward Classes and not castes,[241] the notion of caste was in some ways officially recognised through adoption of reservation policies for Schedules Castes and Scheduled Tribes via articles 341 and 342[242]. The rationale behind these quotas for SCs and STs was deep-rooted social discrimination and prejudice against them through the practice of untouchability (against SCs) and physical separation (against STs). The context of reservation for OBCs, however, is very different. While the dalits have never been a part of Hindu social system, the backward classes have always been included in the fourth varṇa and labelled as Shudras. Thus, their backwardness is more related to their status position within the caste structure and not discrimination as such.[243] Moreover, the land reform and green revolution in rural India led to enrichment and empowerment of a section of the traditional farming Shudra castes, and made the identification of the backwardness even more complicated.

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[239] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 54.
[240] Sheth, D. L. (1999) Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 34, No. 34/3, pp. 2502-2510.
[241] Article 15(4) of the Constitution enables the state to make "any special provision for the advancement of any socially and economically backward classes of citizens, or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes". There is no mention of the term "Other Backward Classes" anywhere else in the Constitution except in Article 338 relating to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution also does not define the term "socially and educationally backward classes". For various approaches to identify the OBCs, see Galanter, Marc (1978) 'Who Are the Other Backward Classes?: An Introduction to a Constitutional Puzzle', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 13, No. 43/44, pp. 1812–1828.
[242] The complete listing was made via two orders: *The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950*, and *The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950*.
[243] Verma, Vidhu (2012) Non-discrimination and Equality in India: Contesting boundaries of social justice, London; New York: Routledge., p. 94.

7. 2. 1 Kaka Kalelkar Commission

The first Backward Classes Commission, under presidency of Kaka Kalelkar, was appointed in January 1953, formulating four criteria for identifying socially and educationally backward classes:

i) Low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of Hindu society.
ii) Lack of general educational advancement among the major section of a caste or community.
iii) Inadequate or no representation in Government service.
iv) Inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry.[244]

On the basis of these criteria, a list of 2399 backward castes or communities in the entire country was prepared, classifying 837 of these as 'most backward'.[245] Five out of 11 members of this commission were, however, opposed to linking caste with backwardness, and recorded dissent.[246] Kaka Kalelkar, the chairman, also opposed the acceptance of caste as the basis of backwardness, but did not record a formal dissent. In his opinion, identifying backwardness along caste was opposed to the interest of secular democracy, as it strengthens the basis of caste identity. He also stated that identification of backward castes was possible only if information about these castes was accurately available in the census, which is indeed dependent upon the information given by the individual respondents and therefore reflects individual perceptions of caste position. Furthermore, this perception may differ across the regions and the actual backwardness may also depend upon regional development. Thus, the same caste in one state may be included in the list of SCs and in another it may be part of the Backward Classes.[247] In addition, the caste basis of classification also did not suit to the Nehruvian perspective of development, which was aimed at fostering common citizenship based on common loyalty to the modern secular state. Finally, the government decided to give power to the states to establish their own listing mechanisms.[248]

7. 3 Mandal Commission Report

Nearly 23 years after the submission of the report of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission, another Backward Classes Commission was issued under the prime ministership of Morarji Desai.

[244] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 1.
[245] The commission also recommended that women of all categories should be designated as backward and given special consideration.
[246] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 66
[247] Kaka Kalelkar (1955) 'Letter to the President' (submitted while forwarding the First Backward Classes Commission Report, Government of India Publication, New Delhi. Quoted in Mahajan (1998), pp. 138–139.
[248] Verma, Vidhu (2012) *Non-discrimination and Equality in India: Contesting boundaries of social justice*, London; New York: Routledge, pp. 100–101.

Consisting of five members with B. P. Mandal as a Chairman, the commission started to work in January 1979. Its objective was similar: to determine the criteria for defining the socially and educationally backward classes and recommend further steps in providing reservations for them. The findings were published in 1980, placing a total of 3,428 communities in the OBC category, comprising nearly 52% of the Indian population. This number was derived by subtracting from the total population of Hindus and estimated for 43.70% Hindu and 8.40% non-Hindu OBCs.[249] However, as the a number of the Supreme Court judgments disapproved for total quantum of reservations for under Articles 15(4) and 16(4) exceeding 50%, the commission recommended 27% reservation for OBCs in all posts under the Central Government.[250]

However, the very figure of 52% of backward classes in Indian society raises questions about the methodology of the Mandal Commission. Adopting various methods and techniques to identify OBCs, the commission evolved 11 indicators or criteria for determining social and educational backwardness grouped under three broad headings: social, educational and economic. These criteria were as follows:

A. Social

1. Castes/Classes considered as socially backward by others.
2. Castes/Classes which mainly depend on manual labour for their livelihood.
3. Castes/Classes where at least 25 per cent females and 10 per cent males above the State average get married at an age below 17 years in rural areas and at least 10 per cent females and 5 per cent males do so in urban areas.
4. Castes/Classes where participation of females in work is at least 25 per cent above the State average.

B. Educational

1. Classes where the number of children in the age group of 5–15 years who never attended school is at least 25 percent above the State average.
2. Classes where the rate of student drop-out in the age group of 5–15 years is at least 25 percent above the State average.
3. Classes amongst whom the proportion of matriculates is at least 25 per cent below the State average.

C. Economic

[249] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 56.
[250] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 58.

1. Classes where the average value of family assets is at least 25 per cent below the State average.
2. Classes where the number of families living in Kuccha houses is at least 25 per cent above the State average.
3. Classes where the source of drinking water is beyond half kilometer for more than 50 per cent of the households.
4. Classes where the number of households having taken consumption loans is at least 25 per cent above the State average.[251]

All the social indicators were given a weightage of 3 point each, educational indicators a weightage of 2 points each and economic indicators a weightage of one point each. Applying these eleven indicators to all castes covered by the survey for a particular state, the commission classified all castes which had a score of 50% (i. e. 11 points out of 22) or more as socially and educationally backward, and the rest were treated as advanced. As the commission mentioned, the methodology helped to highlight the fact that socially and educationally backward classes are economically backward also.[252] However, the considerable significance given to supposedly social criteria is problematic. For example, early marriage or participation of females in work might be in certain circumstances only some specific traditions related with particular community and do not have to be necessarily linked to backwardness.[253] On the other hand, occupation and income, which can be much more sensible criteria in determining backwardness, were given the least importance. Thus, there has been significant scepticism about whether the communities determined to be OBC were really socially disadvantaged.[254]

7. 3. 1 Conceptual confusion

However, the main problem of the Mandal Commission Report was a basic conceptual confusion.[255] The commission has used the terms caste, class and community interchangeably

[251] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 52.
[252] Ibid.
[253] This situation is somehow surprising, given the protection of community rights embedded in the Indian constitution, and even contradictory to the specific political circumstances of the 1980s when the identity politics was on the rise.
[254] See Béteille, André: *The Backward Classes in contemporary India*. 1992; Radhakrishnan, P.: Mandal Commission Report: A Sociological Critique. In Srinivas, M. N. (ed.): *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*. 1996.
[255] This confusion is apparent also in several court decisions preceding the Mandal report. The original opinion that caste and class are not synonymous (M. R. Balaji v. State of Mysore, A.I.R. 1963 S.C. 649. Mandal report, vol. 2, p. 12; R. Chitralekha v. State of Mysore, A.I.R. 1964 S.C. 1823. Mandal report, vol. 2, p. 21.) was gradually replaced by notion of caste as a class of citizens (P. Rajendra v. State of Madras, A.I.R. 1968 S.C. 1012. In: Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 2, p. 23; A. Periakarupparv v. State of Tamil Nadu, A.I.R. 1971 S.C. 2303. In: Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 2, p. 25.). The Mandal Commission obviously adopted the latter view.

as synonyms, ignoring the substantial differences between them, such as hereditary membership and endogamy typical for a caste, or vertical and horizontal mobility characteristic for a class.[256] Nevertheless, the commission held an opinion that there is a close linkage between the caste ranking of a person and economic status, and that a low ritual caste status of a person has a direct bearing on his social backwardness.[257] Thus, despite being designated to identify backward classes, the Mandal Commission took a caste as a basic unit, as "[c]astes are the building bricks of Hindu social structure. All sorts of virtues and evils have been attributed to caste system by the social historians."[258]

The reference to social historians is important, suggesting that the Mandal Commission uncritically adopted the Western perception of Indian society purportedly organised primarily by the caste system.[259] In fact, the opportunities for social mobility were not completely absent in pre-colonial India, but these possibilities tended to narrow down under British rule. Drawing on previous work of Western orientalists heavily dependent on historical Sanskrit texts, the British started to consider varna order as a prevailing type of social structure in India.[260] This perception was even intensified after the introduction of census in the 19th century, which led to transformation of castes from previously 'fuzzy' into 'enumerated' communities.[261]

7. 4 Indian politics after Mandal

Due to a change in the government in 1979, seeing the Congress coming back to power, the Mandal report was shelved. It was only in 1989 when the Janata Dal government under the prime ministership of V. P. Singh announced to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations. This step can be perceived not only as an attempt to economically and socially empower the backwards, but also as an attempt to win the votes of the communities included in the OBC list which constituted important vote banks for Janata Dal and the reservations could consolidate their caste coalition.[262] Thus, the decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendation can be also understood as a response of Janata Dal to the Congress identity politics in the 1980s. Alienating from the original secular ideals, Congress started to play the regional and communal sentiments against one another, seeking

[256] Saksena, K. D. (2007) "Policy Changes Needed on Reservations". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 26, p. 2497.
[257] Report of the Backward Class Commission, vol. 1, p. 61.
[258] *Report of the Backward Class Commission*. 1980, vol. 1, p. 14.
[259] See Inden, Ronald: *Imagining India*. 1990.
[260] Francine R. Frankel, Rao, M. S. A.: *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*. *Volume II*. 1990. pp. 482–483.
[261] Kaviraj, Sudipta: The Imaginary Institution of India. In Chatterjee, Partha and Pandey, Gyanendra (eds.), *Subaltern Studies VII*. 1992.
[262] Bayly, Susan: *Caste, Society and Politics in India*. 1999.

to gain votes as a single party capable to achieve stability in subsequent chaos.[263] This can be seen in its approach to the Shah Bano case, or in opening the disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya for Hindus in the same year. As the leading opposition party, Congress also criticised the Mandal report and instead of reservations based on caste proposed reservation on economic criteria, aiming on support from its traditional basis – poor upper castes and untouchables.[264]

The implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations led to violent resistance in many parts of India, including a series of self-immolations by high-caste students.[265] It also caused the fall of the government dependent on the support of BJP after L. K. Advani was arrested during his rath yatra in Bihar. But most importantly, it led to a rehabilitation of caste as a primary identity in independent India and 'Mandalisation' of the Indian politics with caste as an important cleavage. From now on, all the Indian political parties, including communists, start to mobilise its electorate on the caste basis.

The failure of the Janata Dal government shows how difficult it is to seize the centre of the political spectre which was vacated by the Congress. Making use of its legacy of the national movement, Congress was able to establish a broad consensus in the society that bridged the various ideological and social cleavages. For the other parties without such a historical advantage, however, it is virtually impossible to address multiple sections of the society, as they originally emerged as an opposition to the Congress. On the other hand, if their focus remains too narrow, they end as exclusivist parties without any capacity for cross-sectional mobilization. Although Janata Dal did not meet the ambitions to replace Congress in the middle ground of the Indian politics as a centre-left secular party and started to decompose soon after the collapse of its government, its successors such as Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, Biju Janata Dal in Odisha or Samajwadi party in Uttar Pradesh has been able to retain its electoral basis among the lower castes and to defeat the Congress Party on the regional level in the Legislative Assemblies elections.[266] The confrontation of interest between the upper and intermediate castes on the one hand and the lower castes on the other one had also a substantive impact on the growing caste violence in the beginning of the 1990.

[263] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. In Chatterjee, Partha (ed.): *State and Politics in India*. 1998, p. 119.
[264] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *India´s Silent Revolution.* 2003, p. 428.
[265] Bayly, Susan: *Caste, Society and Politics in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
[266] Yadav, Yogendra: Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections 1993–1995. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31 (Jan. 13–20, 1996), No. 2/3, pp. 95–104.

7. 5 Caste in Indian politics

We should however resist the temptation to consider the rise caste politics as a substantive change in the Indian political discourse. Caste as a ready-made identity has been present in the Indian politics since Independence[267] and the jati of the candidates was a crucial factor of electoral politics even in the 1950s. As Yogendra Yadav points out, the real difference in the caste politics of the 1990s lies not in the mutual influence of castes and politics, but rather in the manner in which politics has started to shape the caste identities. While in the first electoral system, the voters were mobilized around their jatis as primary social blocs, the pattern of caste mobilization changes after the Mandalisation. In the second electoral system, the basis for creating electoral majorities has shifted to the state-wide alliances of jatis, corresponding more with the varnas. In the 1990s, the voters no longer identify themselves as members of their caste, but more likely as a member of a broader social group, such as an OBC or a Dalit.[268]

During the first three decades after Independence, this process was held back by the Congress politics. The Nehruvian project of modernisation, economic progress and national unity constituted the ideological framework of the Indian state, supported with careful political mobilisation from the top down. In recruiting the votes of the rural peasantry, the Congress created a patron-client type of relationships between the upper and lower castes, where the rich peasants and professionals were used as intermediaries in spreading the national and party ideology. Thus, the Congress leaders sought to cultivate influential leaders of the dominant agricultural castes, the Muslims, the dalits, and the tribals.[269] Thanks to this "coalition of extremes",[270] Congress was able to secure 35—50% vote share across most of the castes and communities and could profile itself as a genuine catch-all party until the end of the 1980s. Unlike the colonial rulers, the Congress under Nehru also decided not to count castes, because it was afraid it would permanently fragment the constituency of the Congress. The process of politicisation of castes and emergence of caste-oriented parties could be fully unleashed only after Congress lost its dominant position in Indian politics. From this point of view, even the demand to establish the Mandal Commission by the Janata government could be perceived as a political attempt to split the Congress votebank.

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[267] See Kothari, R. (ed.) (1970) *Caste in Indian politics*. London: Sangam; Srinivas, M. N. (ed.) (1996) Caste: its Twentieth Century Avatar. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
[268] Yadav, Yogendra, "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989–99". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 34/35 (Aug. 21 – Sep. 3, 1999), p. 2398
[269] Francine R. Frankel, M. S. A. Rao. Op. cit. 1990, p. 493.
[270] Brass, Paul (1980) 'The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State – Part II', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 8 (1), pp. 3–36.

7. 5. 1 Bihar and Uttar Pradesh: Two different patterns

Political mobilisation of OBCs is stronger in regions where they constitute larger proportion of the population and where the caste differences have always been deeper. Thus, the most striking manifestation of this process can be seen in Northern India, particularly in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, whereas in Southern India, the OBC movement is less assertive. The roots of the caste cleavages in the Ganga valley can be attributed to the closest approximation to the stratified original system of the ancient *varna* order,[271] which was further enhanced by the acquisition of individual property rights under British law, leading to greater dominance of upper caste landlords over the cultivating peasantry.[272]

However, each of these two states followed different trajectory. In Bihar, the contours of political life were determined by the emergence of two caste formations by the 1960s: Forward Castes, comprising twice-born caste groups and cooperating with the Congress, and Backward Classes claiming to represent the interests of all of the 'downtrodden', but in practice articulated the demands of the advanced Upper Shudras.[273] Their competition was even sharpened by the increase in unemployment and underemployment from the early 1970s, and saw its culmination when Lalu Yadav became the chief minister in 1990. Giving several benefits to the entire backward class (both backward castes and dalits), Lalu succeeded in keeping the backward class movement united as a powerful bloc in Bihar politics.[274]

In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, two rivals emerged to fight for the space vacated by the Congress – the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Samajwadi Party (SP).[275] The BSP aspired to a complete sway over the so-called "bahujan samaj" (majoritary society comprising both SCs and OBCs),[276] but ended up consolidating its hold over the dalits, especially the chamars and the jatavs. By contrast, the OBCs were attracted by the Samajwadi Party – a direct successor of the Janata Dal under the leadership of Mulayam Singh Yadav. This situation has its particular historical roots in the land reform, as the intermediate groups of jats and yadavs felt

[271] Francine R. Frankel, Rao, M. S. A.: *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*. Volume I. 1989. pp. 5–6.
[272] Francine R. Frankel, Rao, M. S. A. Op. cit. 1990, p. 482–483.
[273] Frankel, Francine R.: Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar: Breakdown of the Brahminical Social Order. In Frankel and Rao. Cit. op. 1989, p. 47.
[274] As the Congress was completely ousted from the competition, it started to form pre-election alliances with Lalu's Rashtriya Janata Dal. Cristopher Jaffrelot calls this process 'indirect Mandalisation', as the upper caste party prefers cooperation with an OBC party rather than fielding lower caste candidates. See Jaffrelot, Christophe (2003) *India´s Silent Revolution*, p. 433.
[275] The BJP as the third major player gradually lost the game, as the social issues were given preference before the communal cleavages. In the 1990s, however, it was able to attract votes of the lower dalits, so-called 'ati-dalits', such as pasis, bhangis, balmikis, doms or khatiks, and formed an alliance with the BSP in 1997–2003. Its outstanding electoral performance in the beginning of the 1990s was nonetheless caused mainly by the collapse of the Congress and disintegration of Janata Dal.
[276] Idea developed by Jyotiba Phule and promoted by Kanshi Ram, founder of the BSP.

a challenge from lower classes and often adopted an extremely aggressive posture against the dalits, ending in increasing incidents of violence against dalits in 1980s and widening the gap between the Scheduled Castes and middle and backward castes.[277]

Thus, despite a long tradition of backward castes politics since the 1950s and 1960s through the efforts of Ram Manohar Lohia, Kanshi Ram and Chaudhury Charan Singh, the backward movement in Uttar Pradesh has failed to address the issue of 'backward identity'.[278] The attempt to form a "bahujan samaj" in BSP-SP combine in the beginning of the 1990s remained unsuccessful,[279] and the recent history saw two hostile formations competing in the elections. Both of the parties, and SP in particular, have aimed on broadening their electoral support by fielding candidates from various caste backgrounds,[280] but they failed to extend the social justice agenda beyond the reservations issue. As a result, the scene came to be dominated by the neo-rich, landed and business classes who continued to play the game with the same set of rules which had been used by their predecessors.[281] Some observers even say that even the competition for jobs within the quotas has become privatized and the government job comes to the members of the most influential groups.[282]

7. 5. 2 The "coalition of extremes" and its downfall

Until the 1990s, the Congress party was able to attract the votes from the broad range of the electorate. With its ability to obtain 35–50% of the vote in virtually every social group, it enjoyed the position of a true catch-all party. In Northern India, however, its rule was based more on so-called "coalition of extremes"[283] as it drew its support on the votes of three almost antagonist groups: Brahmans, Dalits and Muslims. After the adoption of the Mandal Commission Report in 1990, a huge debate burst out also in the Congress, resulting in the proposal of reservations on the basis of economic criteria. In fact, this was another attempt to maintain the "coalition of extremes" by indirectly offering reservations to the poor from the

[277] Hasan, Zoya: (1989) Power and Mobilization: Patterns of Resilience and Change in Uttar Pradesh Politics. In Frankel and Rao. Cit. op. 1989, pp. 133–203.
[278] Verma, Anil K.: Backward Caste Politics in Uttar Pradesh, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40 (2005), No. 36, p. 3891.
[279] The coalition government of BSP and SP lasted only 16 months from november 1993 to june 1995. See Pai, Sudha: *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution. The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*. 2002, p. 162.
[280] Pai, Sudha: *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution. The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh*. 2002, pp. 180, 238.
[281] Verma, Anil K.: Backward Caste Politics in Uttar Pradesh, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40 (2005), No. 36, p. 3891.
[282] Jeffrey, Craig: Democracy without representation: the power and political strategies of a rural elite in north India. *Political Geography*, Vol. 19 (2000), No. 2, pp. 1013–36.
[283] Brass, Paul: The Politicization of the Peasantry in a North Indian State – Part II. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 8 (1980), No. 1, pp. 3–36.

upper castes and Dalits, while overlooking the backward castes, which were beyond the concern of the Congress. [284]

With its ambiguous approach towards reservations, Congress missed an opportunity to become the party of the underprivileged, as the BJP was dependent entirely of the votes of higher castes and middle classes during this period. Due to its catch-all strategy, however, it was able to invite only the voters which were not already attracted by the BJP or other parties. Moreover, Congress was reluctant not only to the agreements and coalitions with other parties championing the lower castes, which was necessary for building such genuine bloc of underprivileged voters, but even to giving tickets to the candidates from the SC and OBC background, which contributed to further erosion of its credibility. [285] As a result, Congress gradually lost even the votes of the Dalits in Northern India, who were attracted by the *Bahujan Samaj Party* of Kanshi Ram.

7. 5. 3 Second democratic upsurge and "creolization" of democracy

The elections in 1993–1995 have led to further democratization and regionalization of the Indian politics. According to Yogendra Yadav,[286] the higher voter turnouts among the backward castes in Northern India marked the so-called second democratic upsurge and started the third phase of the Indian party system: After the first 20 years of the Congress system dominated by the single largest party and terminated by the first democratic upsurge, and the "Congress–Opposition system"[287] where Congress retains a salience in the party system but without domination, India moves to the post-Congress polity where the Congress is no longer the natural party of governance or the pole against which every political formation is defined.[288]

In this period, Congress also realized that the "coalition of extremes" was breaking down, as the higher castes are gradually attracted by the BJP and the lower by the BSP and successors of Janata Party. As a response, it starts to change its rhetoric and focuses on particular social groups. In the 1996 electoral campaign, Congress presents itself as a tribune of the backward castes and its electoral manifesto even carry the message that the reservations for the backward classes was originally the Congress idea.[289] It continues in constructing its image as

[284] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *India´s Silent Revolution.* 2003, p. 428.
[285] Yadav, Yogendra, Kumar, Sanjay, Heath, Oliver: The BJP´s new social bloc. *Frontline*, 19 Nov. 1999, p. 40.
[286] Yadav, Yogendra: Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections 1993–1995. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31 (1996), No. 2/3, pp. 95–104.
[287] Ibid., p. 99.
[288] Yadav, Yogendra: Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989–99. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34 (1999), No. 34/35, pp. 2393–2399.
[289] Indian National Congress (I): *Election Manifesto – General Elections 1996*, New Delhi: AICC (I), 1996, pp. 11–12.

a party of consensus which is determined to save the country from the caste war, and as a guardian of the backward castes at the same time. It was however not able to receive more than some 20% of their votes. At the same time, Congress begins to lose also the support from the upper castes which move to the BJP, while the Muslim minority abandons the Congress for its reluctance to protect the Babri Masjid.

This inability to retain the votes of the lower castes proved to be one of the principal reasons of the Congress decline. After being defeated in a number of consecutive elections in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the 1990s, Congress rather forms the pre-electoral alliances with the champions of the lower castes. Christophe Jaffrelot brands this tactics as an "indirect Mandalisation" in the sense that Congress rather forms an alliance with a low-caste party than to promote the OBCs and Dalits in its own party structure and field them as election candidates.[290] Another effect of the assertion of the lower castes was the so-called "creolisation of democracy", as the Indian politics experienced the influx of contestants from the lower orders of society, who brought with them their own local concerns and interests, but without proper knowledge of the practices of the liberal democracy. Ironically enough, this all happened in the time when the national economy became more globalized and the most important decisions moved out of the reach of the new regional politicians.[291]

7. 6 Reinforcing caste identity

The assessment of the reservation politics after Mandal remains ambiguous. Despite 27% of posts being reserved for OBCs from 1993, overall representation of OBC in government services was as low as 4.53% in 2004.[292] Many critics have also pointed out that reservations provide benefits only to the upper sections of the community (so-called 'creamy layer') which has not been discriminated against, creating the gap between community and its elite.[293] On the other hand, purely economic criteria prove to be an unstable basis for identifying the weaker sections of the society, as they can be easily manipulated. However, as caste is not a static group, the reservation politics should also adopt a more dynamic scheme, perhaps by examining the Mandal Commission criteria.

Caste-based differentiation was present in the Indian politics ever since the Independence and its origins can be found even in the colonial period. Given the processes of de-ritualisation

[290] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *India´s Silent Revolution.* 2003, p. 434.
[291] Yadav, Yogendra: Electoral Politics in the Time of Change. 1999, pp. 2397–2398.
[292] 11th Five Year Plan 2007–2012. Inclusive Growth, vol. 1. Delhi: (Planning Commission, GOI) Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 120. Quoted in Verma, Vidhu: *Non-discrimination and Equality in India: Contesting boundaries of social justice*, London; New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 111
[293] Mendelsohn, Oliver: A 'Harijan Elite'?: The Lives of Some Untouchable Politicians, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21 (1986), No. 12, pp. 501–509.

and politicisation of caste, coming together with the decline of the Congress as a catch-all the catch-all party, the acceptance of Mandal Commission report can be perceived as a logical apex of this development. However, it was the very implementation of methodologically problematic Mandal recommendations which transformed the caste into the main cleavage on the Indian political scene and completely changed the political discourse of the country. The intensified fragmentation along the caste lines provided the political leadership with structural basis for political mobilisation and started the rise of exclusivist parties oriented only on certain sections of the society and their group identities. Growing democratisation of the politics goes hand in hand with growing tensions between the social groups, often belonging to the economically poor and socially disadvantaged sections of the Indian society. Unfortunately, this polarisation plays into hands of the ruling classes, providing them with ready-made votebanks. Thus, elaboration of more sensitive criteria for identifying backwardness could not only help to come close to the ideal of social justice, but also to the ideal of fully democratic polity.

8. Ayodhya dispute as a grave of Indian secularism?

On 6 December 1992, the five centuries old Babri mosque in Ayodhya was demolished by the mob of Hindu fanatics during a political agitation which turned into riot. The incident was considered as an unprecedental assault on the values of Indian secularism, but another severe blow was still to come. On 30 September 2010, the six decade old title suit on the disputed land in Ayodhya on which the Babri Masjid once stood was finally untangled. Nevertheless, the verdict of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court to divide the land into three equal parts among the parties is largely problematic, as a property dispute was decided more on faith and belief than on historical evidence. In a broader context, the fate of Babri Masjid, or Ramjanmabhoomi, can be compared to the very fate of the Indian secularism. After several wrong decisions of the State, both issues have taken a direction which has ultimately led to a huge distortion both of the Ayodhya debate and the secular principles in India.[294]

At the first sight, the verdict of reached by Justice S. U. Khan, Justice Sudhir Agarwal and Justice D. V. Sharma looks reasonably. The Bench opted for a compromise solution to the controversy lasting for more than 60 years, and the Hindu radicals who would like to build a temple instead of the mosque did not obtain the whole plot. The court ordered a three-way partition on the basis of historical use of the site, adjudging one third to the Muslim foundation *Sunni Central Waqf Board*, one third to the Hindu sect *Nirmohi Akhara*, and one third to the very Lord Rama in his infant appearance (*Ram Lalla*), represented by the *Hindu Mahasabha*.

However, if we examine the judgement deeper, we will see that the verdict is largely problematic for several reasons. First, it harms the interests of the Indian Muslims, and not for the first time. As A. G. Noorani notices, Muslims have been wronged in every single court ruling from 1950 to 2010, including the verdict after the demolition of the mosque on 6 December 1992. In addition, the judgement of the Allahabad court attributed the central part of the plot where the mosque used to be located to the Hindus. Two of the Hindu judges even said that the medieval structure had been built against the principles of Islam[295] and thus could not have been a mosque. By this justification, they de facto sanctified the conversion of the mosque into a temple.[296]

[294] This is a revised version of my article which was originally published in Czech. See Krejčík, Jiří: Ajódhja – hrob indického sekularismu? *Nový Orient*, Vol. 66 (2011), No. 1, pp. 12–15.
[295] Justice D. V. Sharma judgment, Vol. 1, pp. 240–263, cited in: Gupta, Anupam: Dissecting the Ayodhya Judgment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLV (December 11, 2010), No. 50, , p. 34.
[296] Noorani, A. G.: Muslims Wronged. *Frontline*, Vol. 27, No. 21, Oct 09–22, 2010. Online: http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2721/stories/20101022272112500.htm [2018/03/20].

Even more important that the result is the manner in which the judges have came to the final decision. The litigation was not decided on the basis of proprietary rights but rather on the basis of religious faith (or ideology?)[297] which should not enter the realm of independent judiciary. The court recognized that the disputable plot is the native place of the mythical king Rama (*Rāmjanmabhūmi*) for whose existence there is no evidence, but who was still present in the case as a juristic person. Thus, if translated to the theoretical level, the judgement of the Allahabad High Court denies all the principles of the Indian secularism: not only it admits the exclusivity of the religious groups, but it also prefers their group rights against the civil ones in the property litigation. Ironically, the recognition of the god Rama as a legal person with individual property rights can be seen as an implementation of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's paradox of blending the idea of liberal rights with the principle of eternity.

8. 1 Babri Masjid as a reification of the secular idea

It is not a mere coincidence that this unprecedented verdict was reached in this case, as the fate of the Babri Masjid resembles the story of the independent India in many ways. In a certain manner, the tale of this religious structure can illustrate the story of the religious tolerance and secular ideas in the Indian state. According to the historical sources, the mosque in Ayodhya was built by the Mughal emperor Babar in the years 1527–1528. The mosque was probably erected on the spot of a former Hindu temple, which was a common practice of the Muslim rulers. However, we cannot tell whether the original temple was razed or whether it had been already demolished by the time when the construction began. At the same time, Ayodhya is the birthplace of the mythical king Rama according to the Hindu tradition. Although no sacred text specifies where exactly was the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic born, the Hindu community believes that it must have happened somewhere close to the mosque. During the course of time, both religious communities managed to find a compromise and Hindus could practice their prayers on a platform (*cabūtra*) close to the mosque. This peaceful coexistence lasted until the Independence.

Before the Indian constitution could come into effect, the Indian secularism was subject to the first loading test. In the night from 22nd to 23rd December 1949, a group of Hindus broke into the mosque, installing the idols of king Rama and his wife Sita inside the structure. Although they were seen by the police, no action was taken. On the next day, thousands of local Hindus gathered in front of the mosque, believing that a miracle had occurred. When the prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru got to know about the incident, he immediately asked the chief minister of the United Provinces (today's Uttar Pradesh) to remove the idols from the mosque.

[297] Cf. Nandy, Ashis: The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance. *Alternatives*, Vol. XIII (1988)., p. 178.

Nevertheless, the local municipality refused to obey and the mosque was only locked with the Hindu idols inside.

Interestingly, the municipality could have resolved the quarrel relatively easily. Article 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure from 1898 says that if any of the parties to the controversy has been forcibly and wrongfully dispossessed, the magistrate may treat the dispossessed party as if it had been in possession – which would mean to expel the Hindus and restitute the mosque to the Muslims.[298] However, this never happened. Although both parties tried to solve the case before the court, they were never successful and the controversy lasted for more than 60 years. During that time, the Indian secularism has mutated into a peculiar form.

8. 2 History and mythology

The Babri Masjid controversy remained a regional quarrel until the end mid-1980s. It reached the national level only in 1984 when the VHP announced that it adopted the "liberation" of Ramjanmabhoomi from the Muslim dominance as it principal goal. The Rajiv Gandhi government which focused on wooing the Hindu vote did not take measures to counter the growing tension. As the Congress party realized that the religious topics attract the Hindu voters, it even started to emulate the strategy of the BJP. Not only Rajiv Gandhi did not stop the campaign of the VHP–BJP combine, but he even referred to the Rama's kingdom (*Rāma Rājya*) in his own electoral campaigns. On 1st February 1986, the district court in Faizabad ruled that the locks from the gates would be removed and Hindus permitted to worship inside the mosque. The VHP celebrated, while the Muslim community demanded the mosque to be re-established as a Muslim place of worship. Although the Government established a special committee to resolve the dispute and even managed to bring both parties to the negotiations, no compromise was reached. Meanwhile, the Hindu nationalist organizations escalated their campaign for the Ramjanmabhoomi which reached its peak on 6 December 1992. The VHP rally in front of the mosque gradually turned into riot, during which about 25,000 Hindu volunteers (*kar sevaks*) broke into the complex and managed to completely demolish the structure during a single afternoon.[299] Ironically enough, the Hindu fanatics have demolished even the platform which was used for the Hindu prayers since 1855.

The Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao announced the very next day that the mosque would be re-built. Instead of maintaining his promise, however, he turned to the Supreme Court to decide whether the mosque had really been built on the site of a former Hindu temple. He

[298] Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Act No. V of 1898).
[299] Chanchreek, K. L., Prasad, Saroj (eds.): *Crisis in India*. Delhi: H. K. Publishers. 1993, p. 109. Cited in Udayakumar, S. P.: Historicizing Myth and Mythologizing History: The 'Ram Temple' Drama. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25 (Jul.–Aug., 1997), No. 7/8, p. 16.

earned the criticism from the Indian jurists, as the archeological findings should not be considered as evidence before the court. Moreover, the Congress party lost its credibility both among the Muslims, because it allowed the destruction of the mosque, and among the upper-caste Hindus, because they started to consider the Congress as a pseudo-secularist party, seeking to the appeasement with the Muslims.[300]

The VHP documents about Ayodhya refer both to historical sources and archelogical surveys which allegedly prove the existence of the Hindu temple on the place of the Babri Masjid.[301] However, all the surveys confirmed only a previous existence of a structure on the spot without a clear evidence for the ancient Hindu temple. Although the World Archeological Congress was called to New Delhi from 4th to 11th December 1994, the controversy gradually shifted from the domain of science and history to the mythological and ideological level and became a matter more of faith than fact.[302] Interestingly, even the size of the disputed area entered the realm of myths. Although most of the Indian media use the information about 2.77 acres, this is only the area which the Uttar Pradesh government acquired in 1991 and which was reduced to 0.26 acre the next year.[303]

Although Ayodhya was mentioned as the birthplace of Lord Rama neither by Swami Vivekananda nor V. D. Savarkar,[304] the VHP materials designated the town in eastern Uttar Pradesh as the holiest Hindu place constantly facing attacks from the Muslims:

> "A long history of 77 wars for prevention of fully demolishing the temple and obstruct the completion of mosque thereon is evident, out of which 5 were at the time of Babar, 10 Humayun, 20 Akbar, 30 Aurangzeb, 5 Nawab Sahadat Ali, 3 Nasiruddin Haider, 2 Wajid Ali Shah and 2 under the British rule. The sacrifices in these struggles prevented erection of minarets and pond for Wazu and proper arrangement of offering Namaz and also kept intact the 14 pillars of the temple on which idols of Hindu gods and goddesses are still alive."[305]

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[300] Zérinini-Brotel, Jasmine: The BJP in Uttar Pradesh: From Hindutva to Consensual Politics? In Jaffrelot, Christophe, Hansen, Thomas Blom: *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India*. 1998, p. 93.
[301] *History versus Casuistry: Evidence of the Ramajanmabhoomi Mandir presented by the Vishva Hindu Parishad to the Government of India in December–January 1990–91*. Delhi: Voice of India, 1991.
[302] Udayakumar, S. P.: Historicizing Myth and Mythologizing History: The 'Ram Temple' Drama. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25 (Jul.–Aug., 1997), No. 7/8, p. 11.
[303] Joshi, Sopan: Ayodhya Churns Up the Right. *Tehelka*, Vol. 7, No. 41, October 16, 2010. Online: http://www.tehelka.com/story_main47.asp?filename=Ne161010AYODHYA.asp [2018/03/20]
[304] Gupta, Anupam: Dissecting the Ayodhya Judgment. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLV (December 11, 2010), No. 50, p. 35.
[305] Lodha, Guanmal: *How Long Shri Ram Will Be Insulted in Ayodhya?* VHP, undated, probably 1989, p. 8. Cited in: Jaffrelot, Christophe: *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*. 1996, p. 402.

8. 3 Faith and myths in the secular state

It is obvious that the significance of the Ayodhya mosque or temple does not lie in its historical value or its sacredness, but rather in its symbolic meaning. As Sheldon Pollock points out, worshipping of the cult of Lord Rama was related to the defence against the Muslim invaders from the middle ages. [306] It is thus obvious that the judges of the Allahabad High Court were under great pressure and a strictly secular verdict dismissing the demands of the Hindu Mahasabha would mean a risk of further conflicts. However, the judgment dividing the disputed land into three parts does not prepare conditions for future compromises. By contrary, it helped the Hindu radicals who would like to gain full control over the site – especially by allocating the central part of the plot, where the mosque used to stand, to the Hindus. By recognizing the Ramjanmabhoomi as a real birthplace of Lord Rama, the Allahabad High Court legitimized the long-lasting claims of the Hindu nationalist organizations which would like to win even the last third of the plot in order to build the Rama temple. As the international vicepresident of the VHP Acharya Giriraj Kishore claimed in the interview for Frontline:

> "I appeal to the Muslim community to forget the past and work for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. This is a rare opportunity for them to pave the way for everlasting peace and amity between the two communities and they should avail themselves of this opportunity. Once they do this and give up their claim over the Kashi and Mathura temples, there would be everlasting peace and communal harmony."[307]

The long-time Babri Masjid / Ramjanmabhoomi dispute has shown that the Indian state is too weak to protect its citizens and communities from the religious violence.[308] Additionally, the verdict of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court proved that secularism became a completely exhausted and empty term. Everybody talks about it, but very few understand its principles or follow them, and when an extreme situation occurs, both Muslims and Hindus start to act as members of their respective communities. The judgment of the Allahabad Court therefore must not be understood as a solution to the old dispute, but rather as a start of a new discussion about the meaning of secularism in contemporary India.

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[306] Pollock, Sheldon: Ramayana and Political Imagination in India. *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52 (1993), No. 2, pp. 261–297.

[307] Tripathi, Purnima S.: "We can offer Muslims land anywhere else." *Frontline*, Vol. 27, No. 21, October 09–22, 2010. http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2721/stories/20101022272101600.htm

[308] The conflicts between Hindus and Muslims are different from the religious war in Europe. While the historical conflict between Protestants and Catholics was a clash of two different truth claims, the communal riots in India are of a completely different nature. Hindus do not attack Muslims (and vice versa) because they would like to convert them to their own religious view of the world, but rather to show their strength to the rivalry community. Cf. Kakar, Sudhir: *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict.* 1996.

9. The ultimate success of the passive revolution?

The year 2014 was an especially turbulent one on the Indian political scene. From the Aam Aadmi Party's 49-day rule[309] in the Delhi State Assembly to the Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide victory in the general elections in May, routines of the political system have been broken and its patterns overturned. By capturing the public imagination and creating a new voting bloc, the Hindu nationalist BJP managed to become the first political party since 1984 to secure a clear parliamentary majority with 31% of the vote and 282 out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. Ideologically, the success of the BJP is even more important: it marks an end of Nehruvian secularism and socialism as the founding principles of an independent democratic India, and their replacement with the more exclusive concepts of cultural nationalism and economic neoliberalism.[310]

The aim of this article is not to analyse the immediate causes of the BJP's electoral success, but rather to explore the conditions which enabled Narendra Modi to grab the power in such triumphant way. Can we interpret his achievement not only as a victory of a well-elaborated political campaign, but also as a result of deeper transformational processes in the Indian society which took place during the last two decades? In this article, we are going to explore the mutually reinforcing processes of economic neoliberalisation, cultural nationalism and low-caste assertion which occurred in Indian politics in early 1990s. Although none of them has brought a true revolutionary change in organisational structures, could we consider them as a trigger of the rearrangement of the Indian polity and society, crowned by the recent electoral successes of Narendra Modi's BJP? Is it even possible to perceive these processes through the lens of the Gramscian concept of passive revolution, declared inapplicable by Sudipta Kaviraj in his classic essay almost thirty years ago?

9. 1 Multiple revolutions

Since the Independence, India has gone through several transformational processes which have altered the social order in truly revolutionary ways and were described in various terms by Indian historiography. *Green Revolution* is the first one of those, referring to the changes which took place in Indian agriculture during the 1960s. These years saw an unprecedented

[309] Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party) was formally launched in November 2012, largely drawing on the popular India Against Corruption movement which had been active since the previous year. In the Delhi Legislative Assembly election in 2013, it emerged as the second-largest party and formed a minority government. As it became clear that other major parties would not support the anti-coruption Jan Lokpal Bill, the AAP government resigned.

[310] This chapter is a slightly revised version of my article "Hidden revolutionary processes in 1990s India?" In Arnason, Johann P., Hrubec, Marek (eds.): *Social Transformations and Revolutions: Reflections and Analyses*. Edinburgh University Press, 2016, pp. 168–183.

increase in food production through the introduction of high-yielding varieties of seeds and application of modern agricultural techniques such as chemical fertilizers and irrigation. In combination with land reforms, this led to a restructuring of power relations in the rural areas and an assertion of the lower peasant castes and classes. Structural impact of the *White Revolution*, on the other hand, was comparably less powerful. Still, the dairy development program of the 1970—1990s which linked the consumers with milk producers co-operatives throughout the country, made India the largest milk producer in the world. *Total Revolution*, on the contrary, was a wholly political project. Initiated in Bihar in 1974, it began as astudent movement against misrule of and corruption but soon found its leader in the veteran Gandhian socialist Jayaprakash Narayan. Although the movement adopted revolutionary rhetoric, it remained ideologically vague, without creating a vision of an alternative system. At the end of the day, Jayaprakash's Total Revolution led only to political chaos and even attracted extremist organisations, especially the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of the Hindu nationalist volunteers. The last of the series of transformational processes with revolutionary designation is the *Silent Revolution*. Coined by the French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, the term was used to describe the assertion of the formerly silent majority of lower castes in Northern India in 1980s and 1990s;[311] this can be perceived as a sequel to the former Green Revolution.

9. 2 Failure of passive revolution in India?

For our purposes, however, the notion of *Passive Revolution* will be the most important one. The term originated with Vincenzo Cuoco, Neapolitan conservative thinker of the early stage of the Risorgimento. Cuoco used it to describe the lack of mass participation in the Neapolitan revolution of 1799, advocating such "passive revolutions" as preferable to violent ones involving the popular masses, such as the French model.[312] However, the concept became famous only after the Second World War thanks to the works of Italian Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci. In his famous *Prison Notebooks*, the expression is used with slightly different connotations: Passive revolution means social transformation which takes place beneath the surface of society, in situations where the progressive class cannot advance openly but the class struggle continues despite the surface stability of the regime.[313]

In the Gramscian concept of passive revolution, the political and institutional structures are transformed slowly and gradually without strong social processes. Thus, we can consider the

[311] Jaffrelot, Christophe: *India´s Silent Revolution. The Rise of the Low Castes in North India Politics*. 2003.
[312] See Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. 1971, p. 59, note 11.
[313] In fact, Gramsci is not very precise in this point and thus allows multiple interpretations. See Morton, Adam David: *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*. London: Pluto Books, 2007.

passive revolution as a form of "revolution from above", conducted by the State and emergent bourgeois class without a national-popular base. In Gramsci's sense, passive revolution serves as a condition of modern state formation. At the same time, however, there is a second process linked to the passive revolution.[314] In line with Gramsci's theories of the cultural hegemony in society, the process has more to do with the reaction of the dominant classes to the rebellions of the popular masses and some parts of the popular demands.[315] Thus, it is not a revolutionary social group which would "lead" other groups, but the dominant class or even the State which "leads" the group that should have been the "leading" one in order to establish the institutions of capitalism or to expand capitalism as a mode of production.[316]

If transposed to India,[317] Mahatma Gandhi could be considered the first naïve theorist of the passive revolution with religious overtones. After Independence, the second attempt to conduct a passive revolution was made by the political elites led by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The main features of this concept were the autonomy of the state from the bourgeoisie and the landed elites, secured by its control of heavy industry, mining, transport, communications and other strategic sectors, and its protectionist regime discouraging the entry of foreign capital. In reality, power had to be shared between the dominant classes because none of them had the ability to exercise hegemony on its own. In fact, the ruling bloc in India contained three distinct social groups: bourgeoisie, landed elites (which were replaced by the class of capitalist farmers after Green Revolution) and bureaucratic managerial elite. Within Nehruvian socialism and developmental planning, all the interests of these groups were finely balanced for a long time.[318]

In the course of time, however, conflicts emerged between the bourgeois, bureaucratic and urban segment on the one hand and regional bourgeois interests and agrarian propertied classes on the other. Indira Gandhi solved the electoral crisis by populist moves, playing regionalisms and communities against each other and hoping to benefit from their double insecurity. In the long run, however, the decline of political ideology undermined the basis of

[314] Morton, Adam David: The Continuum of Passive Revolution. *Capital & Class*, Vol. 34 (2010), No. 3, p. 317.
[315] Gramsci, Antonio: *Prison Notebooks, vol. 3*. Edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University, 2007, p. 252.
[316] See Gramsci: Notes on Italian History. Cited in Hoare and Smith: *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. 1971, p. 105.
[317] In 1980s, a group of scholars inspired by Gramsci's work emerged in South Asia. Contrary to traditional historiography, the Subaltern Studies Group led by Ranajit Guha explored the political role of the lower classes and socially marginalised groups – rather than the political roles of the social and economic elites – in the history of South Asia.
[318] Kaviraj, Sudipta: A Critique of the Passive Revolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23 (1988), No. 45/47, p. 2431.

Indian nationalism and ideas of democratic secularism. According to classic essay of Sudipta Kaviraj, this emerging structural crisis marks the failure of the passive revolution in India.[319]

Kaviraj's essay is indeed a brilliant analysis of the Indian political system of the first forty years after Independence. Written in 1987 and published in 1988, however, it could not foresee what would come in the following years. The crisis mentioned and analysed by Kaviraj escalated into three abrupt systemic changes which occurred at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century and transformed the framework of class dominance in such a way that the conditions for a new passive revolution could be created.

9. 3 Mandal affair: Caste enters politics

The first of these seminal changes occurred in 1989, when the Janata Dal government under the prime ministership of V. P. Singh announced that it would reserve 27% of government jobs and places in public universities for so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs).[320] This step, following the recommendations of the Mandal Commission from 1979, can be perceived not only as an attempt to economically and socially empower the backwards, but also as a part of a political game, as several of the communities included in the OBC list constituted important vote banks for Janata Dal and the reservation could consolidate their caste coalition. Thus, the decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations can be also understood as a response of Janata Dal to Congress identity politics in the 1980s and as a political attempt to split the vote bank of the formerly dominant Congress party.

The implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations led to violent resistance in many parts of India, including a series of self-immolations by high-caste students. But more importantly, it led to the rehabilitation of caste as a primary identity in independent India and to the 'Mandalisation' of Indian politics, with caste as an important cleavage.

Caste not only continues to be a significant feature of Indian society, but also becomes an important pattern of group mobilisation on the political scene, as all Indian political parties, including communists, start to mobilise its electorate on a caste basis. The 'master cleavage'[321] between social groups may differ across the states, and the continuing regionalisation of Indian politics has led to situations where one social group or caste may vote for different parties in different states.

[319] Ibid., p. 2441.
[320] For various approaches to identify the OBCs, see Galanter, Marc: Who Are the Other Backward Classes?: An Introduction to a Constitutional Puzzle, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 13 (1978), No. 43/44, pp. 1812–1828.
[321] Yadav, Yogendra: Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections 1993–1995. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31 (Jan. 13–20, 1996), No. 2/3, p. 102.

It would be, however, a huge oversimplification to consider caste politics as something very new in the Indian political discourse. In fact, caste as a ready-made identity has always been present in Indian politics since Independence.[322] Its assertion through the 'silent revolution' is linked to the peasant movement of the 1960s leading to land reforms and rural development, which benefited the upper backward castes, such as Yadavs, Kurmis or Koeris, and led to their conflict with upper caste landlords. It was, however, only after the 1989 measures that the economically strong lower castes could finally take advantage of their position, even on the level of politics, and transform their economic capital into a social one. The process of the secularisation of caste, consisting of its de-ritualisation and politicisation, gradually led to the emergence of a new middle class, associated with ownership of certain economic assets instead of the traditional caste hierarchy.[323]

9. 4 Babri Masjid: Conservative forces strike back

The reaction of the upper and intermediate sections of Indian society followed almost immediately, politically represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party as the champion of the prevalently urban upper castes and classes linked to BrahmaBrahmann orthodoxy and to the Hindutva ideology.[324] Backed by the affiliated Hindu nationalist organisations such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Vishva Hindu Parishad, the BJP started to consolidate its electorate on a religious basis, claiming to support the construction of the Ram Temple instead of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. As the key initiative of the *Ramjanmabhoomi* campaign, the *rath yatra* (chariot march) was launched in autumn 1990 in Somnath by the BJP. It was to be undertaken across nine states and would culminate at Ayodhya on 30 October 1990, the proposed day for the construction of the new Rama temple by the VHP.

Both of these processes, sometimes referred to as the Mandal-Mandir combination, symbolically intersected on 23 October 1990. On that day, Lal Krishna Advani, leader of the BJP and conductor of the *rath yatra*, was arrested in Bihar by then chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav during his political campaign. Advani's detention on his tour can be considered a symbolic act, as a leader of a party representing predominantly upper castes and invoking communal sentiments was stopped by a champion of lower castes, himself an OBC. The incident not only caused the fall of V. P. Singh's government dependent on the support of

[322] Kothari, Rajni (ed.): *Caste in Indian politics*. 1970; Srinivas, M. N. (ed.): *Caste: its Twentieth Century Avatar*.1996.
[323] Sheth, D. L.: Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34 (1999), No. 34/3, pp. 2502–2510.
[324] The concept of Hindutva was first used in 1923 by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, describing Hinduism as an ethnic, cultural and political identity. Borrowing the European Romantic concept of the nation, Savarkar extends the concept of "Hindu" beyond religion to a term of cultural nationalism. See Savarkar, V. D., *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* 1969 [1923].

BJP; put in a broader context, it revealed the assertions of the rural lower castes on the one hand, and the urban upper and intermediate castes on the other.

Although the *rath yatra* was stopped before reaching its destination, the VHP activists continued to agitate for the construction of the temple for more than two years. As a result of this campaign, the Babri mosque was demolished on 6 December 1992 by violent Hindu mobs organised chiefly by the VHP and RSS volunteers. The operation lasted about six hours, but both the central and state government witnessed the action helplessly. The story goes that the prime minister Narasimha Rao was just taking a nap and nobody would want to disturb him. In reality, the Congress party apparently wanted to take use of the demolition to discredit the BJP and to dismantle the political power of its opponent.[325]

Obviously, the assertion of religious communities did not happen all of a sudden. Analogously to the reinforcement of caste identities, it was a response to a long-lasting conflict, further boosted by the Congress populism in the 1980s. Departing from its original secular ideals, Congress started not only to appease separate religious communities by *ad hoc* concessions, but even to play the regional and communal sentiments against one another, seeking to gain votes as a single party capable of achieving stability after temporary chaos.[326] This tactics can be seen best in Congress's approach to the Shah Bano case, which resulted in the implementation of The Muslim Women (Protection on Rights of Divorce) Act in 1986,[327] or in opening the disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya for Hindus in the same year.

The dynamics of the political assertion of the broader Hindu community was similar to that of the rise of the bloc of backward castes: while the latter was a result of the enrichment and empowerment of a section of the traditional farming Shudra castes, BJP constituted a party of the growing urban elite. The confrontation of interest between the upper and intermediate castes on the one hand and the lower castes on the other one had also a substantive impact on the growing caste violence at the beginning of the 1990s. In the long run, it led to the rise of caste-based and regional parties and overall fragmentation of the Indian party system.

9. 5 Failure of revolutionary politics

While the middle classes managed to grasp their opportunity and articulate their demands through revitalised or newly emerged political parties, the impact of left-wing politics on

[325] Van der Veer, Peter: Writing Violence. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996,. p. 254.
[326] Manor, James: Parties and the Party System. In Chatterjee, Partha (ed.), *State and Politics in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 119.
[327] For more detailed account on Shah Bano case, see Mody Nawaz B.: The Press in India: The Shah Bano Judgment and Its Aftermath, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 27 (1987), No. 8, pp. 935–953.

contemporary Indian political discourse remained fairly limited. Notwithstanding the fact that the classical Marxist discourse considers caste-focused analysis as a deviation from class analysis, leaderships of the well-established communist parties have mainly come from the upper Brahman caste with its standard hereditary privileges. Together with the notion of a unitary Indian state and reluctance to engage in identity politics, these conditions led to their virtual support of the status quo and in the end to ineffective politics. In the states of Kerala and West Bengal, where Communist parties constituted state power for many years, they did not even manage to dismantle the economic power of capitalist enterprise. Instead, they continued the system of market economy with state subsidies for the major Indian and foreign companies, which eventually led to the antagonism of the workers and peasants and a miserable defeat of the Communist parties in the West Bengal assembly elections in 2011.

On the other hand, the Maoist groups which emerged after the split of the original Communist Party of India in the 1960s remained underground throughout the years. Denouncing parliamentary politics and engaging in armed struggle, the so-called Naxalite movement has spread into less developed areas of rural Southern and Eastern India, such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh and evolved into several fairly organised formations with their own distinct political programmes. Unlike in Nepal, where the Maoists have formulated a much wider understanding of their people's democratic revolution and after signing a peace accord with the Nepalese government even managed to win regular parliamentary election, the Naxalites' support basis still remains restricted to the poor rural areas and their ideological formulation is still not adequately developed on the issue of class-caste-gender relationship.[328]

9. 6 Economic liberalisation: Hindutva unleashed

Both the abovementioned trends and their intertwining with political issues were further reinforced by the third important transformative process which took part at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. In 1991, the Congress government started selling public enterprises in order to reduce fiscal deficit. In the following years, the state opened the formerly controlled sectors to private capital, following the neoliberal mantra of four Ds: deflate, devalue, denationalise, and deregulate. The dismantling of the licence regime and greater entry of foreign capital has led not only to a rapid economic growth through the last two decades, but also to a change in the very composition of the capitalist class. Former

[328] Mohanty, Manoranjan: Challenges of Revolutionary Violence. The Naxalite Movement in Perspective. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 41 (2006), No. 29, pp. 3163–3168.

dominance of a few 'monopoly' houses protected by the licences was replaced by many more competitors and much greater mobility.

This economic transition, however, often goes along with emphasis on 'Hindu' cultural and religious identity and growing communal tensions. Quite surprisingly, the BJP soon emerged as the main champion of this combination of neoliberal approach to economics with social conservatism. After securing power in the centre in 1998–1999, it took up the liberalising policies initiated by the Congress. Some of the states, such as Gujarat where the BJP has been permanently in power since 1998, have been accentuated as an example of cultural Hindu nationalism intertwined with economical neoliberalism.

This alliance, in which BJP as the Hindu nationalist party fully supports economic liberalisation, may seem paradoxical, as its party ideology is associated with Deendayal Upadhyay's concept of 'integral humanism',[329] largely drawing on Gandhian thought.[330] However, as Radhika Desai points out, the Hindu nationalism works in the same way as the other cultural nationalisms: It is structured around the culture of the economically dominant classes of the society – in this case the 'Hindu' bourgeoisie and formerly privileged priest and trader castes which felt deprived by reservations and economic restrictions imposed by the Indian State. This reduction allows formulating all problems as threats to the 'nation' from more or less demonised minorities.[331]

9. 7 Rise of a new dominant class?

As we have marked earlier, there is often a tendency to overlook that the ethno-religious conflict might have deeper historical and economic roots in Indian society. Among scholars, the organisational skills of Hindutva are often overrated and support for the BJP attributed

[329] Deendayal Upadhyay (1916–1968) served as a long-time General Secretary of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of the present day Bharatiya Janata Party. In 1965, his programme entitled 'Integral Humanism' was adopted as the official doctrine of the party. Appropriating some significant elements of the Gandhian discourse, such as insistence upon religious and moral values in politics and aspiration to develop an indigenous economic model preserving Hindu values, the concept of integral humanism was used to downplay the original aggressive Hindu communal overtone of the Jana Sangh ideology. For a detailed account on integral humanism, see Chapter 10.

[330] There were several tensions within Hindutva over its approach to *swadeshi* (national self-reliance) versus globalization: even after 1991 RSS protested against foreign and multinational products, while at the same time there were fears in the BJP that the Congress would now win over the traditional Sangh Parivar constituency, consisting of the small traders and industrialists. As a compromise, the economic policy of the BJP had to be reformulated in a more swadeshi-oriented way. This renewed statement enabled the BJP to criticise the Congress for opening the Indian economy to the West on the one hand, and promoting the idea of capitalist growth and free market within India on the other one. For more details, see Hansen, Thomas Blom: The Ethics of Hindutva and the Spirit of Capitalism. In Jaffrelot, Christophe, Hansen, Thomas Blom (eds.): *The BJP and the Compulsion of Politics in India*. 1998, pp. 291–314.

[331] Desai, Radhika: Culturalism and Contemporary Right: Indian Bourgeoisie and Political Hindutva, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34 (1999), No. 12, pp. 695–712.

almost exclusively to the mobilisational activity of the related Sangh Parivar organisations. In this instrumentalist perspective, conflict is seen as a result of an "elite conspiracy" using religion to promote factionalism for electoral and economic gains.[332] The rise of Hindutva, however, cannot be seen in isolation. Along with the decline of Congress and the rise of the regional parties, it is only one of the three political consequences of the gradual shift towards market-driven economy and the fragmentation of Indian polity on the caste/community basis.

The political system, however, is only an illustration of the broader structure and system of the society as such. Analysing the two decades after the turbulent changes which took place at the beginning of 1990s, we can note two distinctive trends. First, there is a shift in the balance of relative power between the corporate capitalist class and the landed elites, leading to the ascendancy of the former. This dominance, however, was not achieved through the mechanism of electoral mobilisation (which used to be the source of the political power of the landed elites before the silent revolution), but through competition on the newly opened field of a liberalised market. In addition, the relation between the state and the dominant classes has been redefined. The autonomy of the state and its interventionist activities have significantly weakened, as there is a strong ideological tendency among the urban middle classes to view the state apparatus as ridden with corruption, inefficiency and populism. On the other hand, there is a much greater social acceptance of the professionalism and commitment to growth and efficiency of the corporate capitalist sector. The urban middle class, once playing a crucial role in creating and running the autonomous developmental state of the passive revolution, appears now to have come under the moral-political sway of the bourgeoisie.[333]

In the past two decades, the Indian middle class has gradually expanded and nowadays constitutes around one fourth of the Indian population.[334] This demographic shift is significant also in electoral politics, as the middle-class voters are more likely to support a free market without state regulations and subsidies, irrespective of their caste. Both of these mutually reinforcing processes broaden the power base of the contemporary capitalists and make Indian society more susceptible to the new round of the passive revolution. In this process, Hindutva is to serve as a ready-made ideology to unify not only predominantly Hindu propertied upper-caste formations, but also to spread to the expanding middle class.

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[332] Basu, Amrita: Mass Movement or Elite Conspiracy? The Puzzle of Hindu Nationalism. In Ludden, David (ed.): *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy*. 1996, pp. 55–80.
[333] Chatterjee, Partha: Democracy and Economic Transformation in India, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43 (2008), No. 16, p. 57.
[334] For methods of identifying the middle class, see Sridharan, Eswaran: The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India's Middle Class: Its Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalisation, *India Review*, Vol. 3 (2004), No. 4, pp. 405–428. For detailed account on Indian middle class, see Fernandes, Leela: *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

The direct reach of corporate capitalism, however, is still limited only to the domain of *civil society*. In Indian condition, the civil society is restricted almost solely to the urban middle classes and represents the domain of capitalist hegemony. But apart from this, there is a much broader domain of *political society* which includes large sections of the rural population and the urban poor. These people have the formal status of citizens and can exercise their franchise as an instrument of political struggle, but they do not have the same access to the organs of the state as the middle classes do. They make their claims on government, and in turn are governed, not within the framework of constitutional rights and laws, but rather through temporary arrangements arrived at through direct political negotiations. On the other hand, this unorganised subaltern domain of political society is not under the moral and political leadership of the capitalist class. [335]

With the continuing rapid growth of the Indian economy, the hegemonic hold of corporate capital over the domain of civil society is likely to continue, with the BJP as its political agent. Moreover, as the middle classes are still expected to grow in numbers in the following years, the significance of civil society in India will also steadily grow. This will inevitably cause new tensions originating from the accumulation of capital by the swelling middle classes on the one side, and on the other the small primary producers such as peasants and artisans who are losing their means of production and are likely to be marginalised in the neoliberal order.

9. 8 Catching the 'Modi Wave'

To analyse the unprecedented success of Narendra Modi's BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, we must first avoid the temptation to interpret the landslide victory as a result of the first-past-the-post electoral system or a personal magic of one charismatic leader. Instead, we should rather ask whether Modi was not simply able to tap the moods of the society and articulate the wishes of a sizeable portion of the electorate. After all, the BJP managed to build an unprecedented coalition of social groups: in addition to its traditional base of the upper-caste social conservatives and economically better-off Other Backward Classes (OBCs), it received a considerable support from the scheduled tribes (STs) and scheduled castes (SCs). In total, the BJP received more votes from STs and SCs than the Congress, which has never happened before.[336]

[335] Chatterjee, Partha: *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Political Society in Most of the World*. 2004, pp. 27–41.
[336] For more analysis, see Chhibber, Pradeep, Varma, Rahul: The BJP's 2014 'Modi Wave': An Ideological Consolidation of the Right. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 (2014), No. 39, pp. 50–56.

Obviously, there has been a clear rightward shift of the ideological centre of gravity in Indian politics. Apart from the neoliberal approach to the role of state in the economy, the arrival of Narendra Modi popularised the public expression of religiosity as a legitimate political action and made the ethnic and religious nationalisms more acceptable. This process was further reinforced by the abject performance of the Congress-led UPA government during its term. Massive corruption at the highest levels and inability to deliver on its promises undermined the trust in the state. The feeling that the state could not actually serve the public had a particularly large impact on the traditional Congress votebank of the marginalised sections of society. Many amongst the poor, who traditionally support the Congress, simply perceived Modi as a better administrator. The anti-corruption emphasis resounded so loudly across society that it became an integral part of the distinctive class culture among the urban middle classes and manifested its strength during the Anna Hazare movement in 2011.

However, as we look back to pre-election times, the major cleavages of the 2014 election emerged not only around the themes of corruption, development or good governance. Just as important was the conflict between civil and political society, projected as a struggle between the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), winner of the recent Delhi legislative assembly elections.[337] In this perception, the BJP was considered as a party of privileged middle classes, using modernist rhetoric of development and occasional references to Hindu mythology to attract support from both social conservatives and the economic right. On the other hand, the AAP was perceived as a representative of the underprivileged lower strata of the society, evoking more traditionalist grassroots solutions as Gandhian self-rule or the Total Revolution of Jayaprakash Narayan.

As the elections showed, it was in fact the AAP that engaged in "elite conspiracy": the party and its program were almost entirely orchestrated by intellectuals who gradually lost their social basis and were not to capture the broader public imagination. The AAP projected itself as the sole heir of the Anna Hazare movement, but in reality, Anna's supporters were recruited mainly from the privileged middle class. The famous sit-in public demonstrations of 2011 were even often co-organized by the RSS cadres. Referring to the heritage of the anti-corruption movement of the 1970s, Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders repeated the mistakes of Jayaprakash Narayan, as they did not challenge the system as such and provided only technocratic solution to the problem of corruption (which itself, after all, can be read as a

[337] AAP's rule in Delhi lasted only for 49 days with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal resigning after a lack of support of the anti-corruption Jan Lokpal Bill. However, in the following assembly elections in February 2015, AAP managed to win even unprecedented 67 seats out of 70, proving that its appeal both towards urban poor and middle class remains strong.

middle-class concern).[338] On the other hand, Hindutva successfully made the step from privileged elites to the masses, using the notion of development to bridge both the material and ideological divides in the Indian society and presenting Narendra Modi as the main architect of Gujarat economic growth.[339]

Being sworn in as the Prime Minister on 26 May 2014, only a day before the 50th anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru's death, Narendra Modi symbolically ends the Nehruvian era in terms of public imagination. By transforming the ideas of the first Prime Minister in his own creative way, Modi seeks to replace the Nehruvian world with his own alternative vision and gradually force out the ideals of socialism and secularism. This approach can be perfectly illustrated by the omnipresent notion of development: while the Nehruvian concept of planning refers to the central government and has undoubtedly restrictive associations, Modi's development sounds more open, spontaneous and liberal. Development is presented as an inclusive process available for everyone irrespective of ethnicity, caste or religion. In other words, Modi promises the members of *political* society that they will be included in the *civil* society through the vehicles of development and better governance. Along with development, there is Modi's strong bias against Delhi (considered as a white, colonial and English-speaking city) which goes hand in hand with his obsessive promotion of the alternative cult of Sardar Patel instead of the Nehruvian one.[340] All these efforts aim at presenting Modi as a spokesman of the new dominant section of the society: the rapidly growing urban middle classes outside the capital, which ascended to the higher levels of Indian society during the last two decades.

9. 9 Towards new hegemony?

For Sudipta Kaviraj, the passive revolution did not succeed in India because the ruling Indian National Congress, ideologically drawing on Nehruvian socialism, was not able to resolve the emerging challenges of regionalism and communalism. Failing to provide political stability, it began to adopt undemocratic and pre-capitalist responses on vital issues.[341] Its collapse,

[338] Teltumbde, Anand: AAP's Chimera of Change, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 (2014), No. 6, pp. 10–11.

[339] Some analysts however argue that Gujarat was economically ahead of the rest of India as soon as in the 1990s, well before the arrival of Narendra Modi whose leadership has not significantly contributed to Gujarat's growht rate in the 2000s. See for example Ghatak, Maitreesh, Sanchari Roy: Did Gujarat's Growth Rate Accelerate under Modi?, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 (2014), No. 15, pp. 12–15; Kalaiyarasan, A.: A Comparison of Developmental Outcomes in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 (2014), No. 15, pp. 55–63.

[340] Vishvanathan, Shiv: Narendra Modi's Symbolic War, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 (2014), No. 22, pp. 10–13.

[341] According to Kaviraj, the compromises with religious and sub-nationalist leaders made by the ruling Congress Party undermined the theory of a common individual citizenship and created grounds for a rapid increase of majority communalism, while its open support for hereditary succession to power and the total suspension of electoral forms within the party helped to reintroduce the retrograde, nearly feudal, forms of

however, prepared the ground for a new form of passive revolution. The new capitalist class, unleashed by the neoliberal economic reforms, has acquired a moral and political hegemony over civil society, consisting principally of the urban middle classes. Its dominance within the state structure derives from the virtual consensus among all major political parties about the priorities of rapid economic growth led by private investment, both domestic and foreign.

In this chapter, we have sketched three important systemic transformations which took part at the beginning of the 1990s and created the necessary pre-requisites for such passive revolution: the Mandal affair, leading to the assertion of the rural lower castes; the Babri Masjid case, symbolising the rise of the urban upper castes; and the liberalisation of the economy, which allowed both of these sections of society to merge in the new Indian middle class. Although they unquestionably affected all the spheres of Indian public in the following years, the abrupt incursions of caste, class and community into the political sphere did not generate an immediate, truly revolutionary process. All of them naturally overlapped with political struggles, but in terms of electoral outcomes, they have been producing only a continuous fragmentation of the party system and remained latent on the central level for more than two decades. The coming of Narendra Modi, however, indicates a momentous change in the distribution of power between the dominant social groups in India and a possible start of the new form of passive revolution.

Yet, the last question remains: if the capitalist class emerging in the globalising Indian landsape is labelled as the conveyor of the newly ignited Gramscian passive revolution, how can we dub the game-changing procedures of the last two decades which prepared the conditions for the fresh revolutionary process to come? Can we speak of a *hidden revolution*?

irresponsible power in the state apparatus itself. See Kaviraj, Sudipta: A Critique of the Passive Revolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23 (1988), No. 45/47, pp. 2439–2440.

10. A new Tryst with Destiny?

On 27th May 2014, exactly 50 years after the death Jawaharlal Nehru, Narendra Modi formally assumed the office of the 14th Prime Minister of India. The celebrations, however, were not in his schedule of the day. While the President Pranab Mukherjee, together with other prominent politicians, paid his respect to the founder of independent India at his memorial, Narendra Modi confined himself to a brief note on his Twitter account.[342] By another coincidence, the very next day fell on the 131st birth anniversary of V. D. Savarkar, and the new Prime Minister's constraint suddenly vanished, as he offered his tribute to the founder of Hindu nationalism by draping garlands around his portrait in the Parliament.[343] The situation in which the paramount representative of the Indian state decided to ignore its principal architect, while worshipping the man whose texts inspired the murderers of Mahatma Gandhi, fully exposed the end of one era of Indian politics. 50 years after Nehru's death, the Hindu nationalists finally managed to capture the nation's imagination and replace the secular elite in the position of the hegemonic power of the Indian state.

Exploiting the nationwide discontents with the politics of the last 70 years, Narendra Modi is the first prime minister who completely rejects the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru. The widespread sense that the Nehruvian secularism has only aggravated the communal antagonisms and the state socialism has not delivered its promised economic benefit sis very strong in the society, and one must admit that the first Prime Minister of independent India himself contributed to these feelings. Despite being a secularist, he did not manage to fully separate religion from state. Although a socialist, his preferences for speed industrialization helped primarily the big business. Albeit a patriot, his hesitation and indecision entailed the humiliating debacle in the Sino-Indian war in 1962. All this mistakes paved the way not only for further failures of his successors, but also the feeling that the former father of the nation is now widely regarded as a traitor.

Although using similar terms, Modi replaces the Nehruvian worldview with his own alternative vision, which is however much less inclusive, more hostile to the religious minorities and promoting such features of Hindu majoritarianism as widespread bans on cattle slaughter.[344] On the other hand, the managerial model of democracy run as a business has

[342] "I pay my tributes to our 1st Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on his Punya Tithi." Narendra Modi's Twitter account, 26 May 2014. Online, https://twitter.com/narendramodi/statuses/471139575826358274 [2018/03/20]

[343] Idiculla, Mathew, The Anti-Nehruvian. Outlook, 12 June 2014. Online: https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-anti-nehruvian/291063

[344] Vaidyanathan, A.: Cow Slaughter Ban and the Welfare of Cattle. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. L, No. 48, November 28, 2015, pp. 44–49.

found many admirers. Modi presents himself as an almost workoholic CEO who sacrifices his time and privacy in favour of his company.[345] He might be demonized as an authoritarian, but this is in fact exactly the feature which makes him even more attractive for the voters who want their problems to be solved as soon as possible.

10. 1 Fear of Fascism

In the Western literature, there is often a strong affection to denounce the Hindu nationalism as an extremist and anti-democratic force which emerged as a response to the fascist movement in Italy and Germany.[346] This is a quite oversimplified reaction, affected by the Western imagination that every right wing movement is potentially fascist. But in fact, Savarkar was a great admirer of Giuseppe Mazzini, not Benito Mussolini. As a non-believer from the Brahmanic background, Savarkar only translated the Brahmanical culture into the terms of an ethnic nationalism drawn from his reading of Western history. The proponents of Hindu nationalism such as RSS and BJP have something to do with authoritarianism and social conservatism, but unlike fascists, they are not interested in the capture of the state and prefer to transform society at the grass-roots level.

On the other hand, the Hindutva forces often feed the Hindu sentiments, increase the religious tensions in the country, and were even involved in the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat, which overturned to a kind of genocide. In retaliation for an assault on a train carrying Hindu pilgrims and activists returning from Ayodhya, the Hindu mobs systematically killed about 2,000 Muslim citizens throughout Gujarat and 100,000 left homeless and dispossessed. The Gujarat state government, consisting of the Hindu-based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and led by a well-known Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi, did not even try to stop the violence. Nevertheless, the communal riots are not an invention of Hindutva and were present in the society even before the arrival of Islam to India. At any rate, the Hindu nationalist definition of an Indian nation became an ever-present magnet, the pole which men like Gandhi and Nehru constantly had to act.[347]

10. 1. 1 The case of Gujarat

The case of the state of Gujarat, for years considered as a laboratory both of the neoliberal economic experiment and the cultural-nationalist project of Hindutva, indicates how the issues of neoliberalism and nationalism can be intertwined and the communal tensions

[345] Kishwar, Madhu Purnima, *Modi, Muslims and Media. Voices from Narendra Modi's Gujarat*. 2014.
[346] Nussbaum, Martha C., 2007. The Clash Within: Democracy, Reiligious Violence and India's Future. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
[347] Khilnani, Sunil: *The Idea of India*. 1997, p. 161.

between Hindus and Muslims exploited or even incited by the Hindu nationalist government. It is not a mere coincidence that such a large-scale riot happened in Gujarat. First, Gujarat has the record of the most destructive communal violence of all the states in post-Independence India.[348] Second, as several authors observe, the neoliberal economic reforms which took place in Gujarat during the 1990s and were further intensified by then Chief Minister Narendra Modi, contributed to increased social tension and aggravated situations of social unrest. As the industrial restructuring led to flexibilisation and casualisation of labour, greater informal employment and uneven development and, the class cohesiveness and awareness was weakened among the workers, while the communitarian unity was encouraged and the existing ethnic divisions become greater.[349] The 2002 Gujarat violence, which has been described as the "first large-scale television and cable riot" covered in real time,[350] became one of the most symptomatic events of the neoliberal India.

10. 2 Integral Humanism

Seemingly discarding the discredited ideology of Hindutva, Modi uses another prominent figure from the Hindu nationalist movement in an attempt to formulate the new national ideology of India. The role of the new father of the nation is to be played by Deendayal Upadhyay (1916–1968), the long-time general secretary and later president of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. His thesis on Integral Humanism (Ekātma Mānavavād), given in a series of speeches in Bombay from 22nd to 25th April 1965, tried to propose the basis for system of governance and development allegedly best suited to the Indian nation and its people.

Allegedly following the tradition of the Vedantic doctrine of *advaita* (non-dualism) developed in 8th century by Adi Shankara, Upadhyay claims that the character of the Indian nation is formed by the unifying principle which is present in every object in the universe. Neglecting the legacy of other schools of Indian philosophical thought, Upadhyay asserts that the principal characteristic of the "Bharatiya culture" is that it looks upon life as an integrated whole, where the diversity in life is merely an expression of the internal unity.[351]

Similarly to V. D. Savarkar and another ideologue of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar (1906–1973), Upadhyay approaches the Herderian conception of the nation, in which the nation is formed

[348] Basu, Amrita: *Violent Conjunctures in Democratic India*. 2015, pp. 162–200.
[349] For the convergence of economic neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism in Gujarat, see especially Chatterjee, Ipsita: Social Conflict and the Neoliberal City (2009), Desai, Radika: Gujarat's Hindutva of Capitalist Development (2011), Nanda, Meera: *The God Market* (2009); and Sud, Nikita: *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State* (2012).
[350] Prasad, Kiran: The Godhra Carnage and Violent Backlash in Gujarat: Secular Politics and the Press. In Prasad, Kiran (ed.): *Political Communication: The Indian Experience*. Delhi: BRPC, 2003, p. 288.
[351] Upadhyay, Deendayal: *Integral Humanism*. 1992 [1968], p. 25.

not by the social contract, but is self-created as the emanation of the "national soul" and inherent cultural attributes:

> "According to the Bhāratiya traditions, a Nation is an organic living entity which has come into existence on its own and has not been made up of, or created by, any group of persons."[352]

Deendayal's organic concept of nation goes so far that the nation is compared to the human being, which is obliged to follow her natural instincts, otherwise she suffers from various illnesses and mental disorders. Thus, "the basic cause of the problems facing Bharat is the neglect of its national identity",[353] i. e. its principal natural instinct. Upadhyay is quite vague in his definition of the inherent nature of the Indian nation, but it is quite evident that similarly to Savarkar in his *Hindutva*, he reduces the Indian nation to the Hindu community. Referring to William McDougall's psychology of group mind, he theorizes about different modes of thinking of Hindus and Muslims which he allegedly discovered in conversation with Vinoba Bhave and M. S. Golwalkar,[354] concluding that:

> "Similarly to the human beings, even a nation has a soul. There is a technique name for it. In the "Principles and Policies" adopted by the Jana Sangh, this name is mentioned. The word is *Chiṭi*. According to McDougal [sic], it is the innate nature of a group. Every group of persons has an innate nature. Similarly every society has an innate nature, which is inborn, and is not the result of historical circumstances."[355]

While *Chiṭi* stands for the nation's soul our consciousness, while the power that energises and activates the Nation is called Virat.[356] Similarly to Prana in the human body, Virat is the capacity which maintains balance and cohesion of the nation, ensuring that the differences within the nation do not lead to conflicts and the nation follow its Dharma. Therefore, the task for the Indian nation is to wake up its Virat in order to revive its glorious past.

As Chetan Bhatt observes, Upadhyay's "integralism" is an elementary reduction of the complexity of Hinduism, legitimised through the language of *advaita*. Apart from ignoring

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[352] Ibid., p. 61.
[353] Ibid., p. 13.
[354] "There can be found honest and good people in Hindus as well as in Muslims. Similarly rascals can be seen in both the societies. No particular society has a monopoly of goodness. However, it is observed that Hindus even if they are rascals individual life, when they come together in a group, they always think of good things. On the other hand when two Muslims come together, they propose and approve of things which they themselves in their individual capacity would not even think of. They start thinking in an altogether different way. This is an everyday experience." See Upadhyay, Deendayal: *Integral Humanism*. 1992 [1968]., p. 38.
[355] Upadhyay, Deendayal: *Integral Humanism*. 1992 [1968], p. 41.
[356] Ibid., p. 80.

the diversity of Indian philosophical tradition and picking up only the non-dualist philosophy, Upadhyaya even reduces the concept of *dharma* from the universal principle of virtual behaviour to a sort of general will of the Indian nation. Because of this strong reductionism, however, the nation and its *Chiṭi* are strongly Hindu in their character, and the national affiliation is thus measured by the religious commitment of the members of the nation.[357] Based on the myth of *Virat-Purusha*, where the Brahmans were created from the head of the primaeval cosmic man, Kshatriyas from hands, Vaishyas from his abdomen and Shudras from legs, Upadhyay even defends the existence of caste system.[358]

In his search for a united nation, Upadhyay also rejects the federal constitution, as it allegedly goes against the unity and indivisibility of the *Bhārat Māta*. Instead, Upadhyay proposes a unitary constitution based on the panchayat (village council) system, while the federal system should be centralized:

> ”According to the first para of the Constitution, ‘India that is Bhārat will be a federation of States’, i.e. Bihar Māta, Bang[l]a Māta, Punjab Mata, Kannada Māta, Tamil Māta, all put together make Bhāratmāta. This is ridiculous. We have thought of the provinces as limbs of Bhāratmāta and not as individual mother. Therefore our constitution should be unitary instead of federal.”[359]

Since *Dharma* is considered to be a supreme power, Upadhyay’s ideal of the state is the “Dharma Rājya” – i. e. the state which is subject to *Dharma* and which is in contrast with the secular state.[360] Dharma Rājya, however, does not mean that the state would adopt theocracy; it is rather a conception where the state is considered a natural living indivisible entity. Rejecting the notion of popular sovereignity on the basis of its fallibility, Upadhyay identifies the national unity with *Dharma,* which he uses to attack all the secessionist movements:

> “Nowadays people advocate that the merger of Goa should be decided by referendum, that there should be plebiscite in Kashmir etc., etc. This is wrong. National unity is our *Dharma*. Decision concerning this cannot be made by plebiscite. This type of a decision has already been taken by the nature. Elections and majority can decide as to who will form the

[357] Bhatt, Chetan: *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*. 2001., p. 156
[358] The *Purusha Sukta*, however, is considered to be a medieval or modern insertion into the Rgveda by such various scholars as Max Müller and Ambedkar. See Ambedkar, *Riddles in Hinduism*, pp. 105–128.
[359] Upadhyay, Deendayal: *Integral Humanism*. 1992 [1968], p. 53.
[360] Ibid., p. 54–60.

> government. The truth cannot be decided by the majority. What the government will do will be decided by *Dharma*."[361]

Integral Humanism was accepted as the new political philosophy of the Jana Sangh in January 1965, and was formulated in direct opposition to Nehruvian, Marxist, and liberal political philosophies. As a political program, Integral Humanism draws largely from the Gandhian thinking. Apart from morality in politics, its central vision is *swadeshi* (self-sustainable production and consumption) and decentralization of economy in small-scale industries.[362] As Meera Nanda points out, integral humanism is almost an exact paraphrase of Gandhi's vision of a future India: Both seek a distinctive path for India, both reject the materialism of socialism and capitalism, both reject the individualism of modern society in favor of a holistic community based on *varṇa* and *dharma*, both insist upon an infusion of religious and moral values in politics, and both seek a culturally authentic mode of modernization that preserves Hindu values.[363] Unlike Gandhi, however, the integral humanism of Upadhyay adopts the modern concepts of nation and state, which together with its emphasis on centralization, disbelief to popular sovereignty and following the principle of dharma make it extremely susceptible to authoritarian tendencies. Its adoption as a national ideology can be thus perceived as another step to redefine the Indian nation on the basis of Hindu majoritarianism and reinforce the notion of India as a predominantly Hindu polity.

10. 3 Second dominant party system?

The trend of the Modi wave was confirmed by the landslide victory in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election in 2017, where the BJP managed to obtain 39,7% of the vote and 312 seats out of 40. The BJP's victory in Uttar Pradesh is even more decisive than in 1991 when it based its campaign on the construction of the Rama temple in Ayodhya. While in the beginning of the 1990s the party's inclination towards right-wing politics included only the cultural aspects in the form of religious conservatism and accentuation of the supposed threat posed by the Muslim minority, today it can attract the voters also by the (neo)liberal economic programme promising reforms and development.

The Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election also showed that the Indian party system is experiencing the third democratic upsurge. After the first democratic upsurge in the late 1960 which signalized the end of the Congress system as a result of a greater mobilization of the OBCs, and the second democratic upsurge during 1996–1998 which brought a greater

[361] Ibid., pp. 58–59.
[362] Ibid., pp. 71–73.
[363] Nanda, Meera, *The God Market*, 2003, p. 217.

political mobilization of the marginalized,[364] India is entering a new phase of the party system. Contrary to the second democratic upsurge, the marginalized castes are deserting the regionally dominant caste-based parties and they are shifting back to the national parties, mainly to the BJP (and partly to the Congress).[365]

Dalits, OBCs and Muslims have a strong feeling that the identity politics cannot offer them more. Identity politics fulfilled its role for the political mobilization, but its benefits reached only the elites of the marginalized groups. Similarly to the General Elections in 2014, the vote for BJP was not a vote for the Hindu rashtra, but rather for a promise of development and empowerment. Even the Muslim community is, contrary to the public perception, willing to cast their votes to the BJP if it offers promises which are attractive enough. BJP managed to accomplish its transformation into the true mass party and it became a new hegemon of the Indian political scene, signalizing the advent of the "second dominant party system."[366] The BJP's hegemonic role lies not only in the fact that it emerged as the single largest party, but also as a party which sets the public agenda, while the other parties cannot but react on its actions. Its ideology, consisting of combination of economic (neo)liberalism and cultural conservatism seems to be defining for the next years of Indian politics.

[364] For the second democratic upsurge, see Yadav, Yogendra: Electoral Politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989–99. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 34/35 (Aug. 21 – Sep. 3, 1999), pp. 2393–2399.
[365] Verma, Anil K.: Third Democratic Upsurge in Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. LI (December 31, 2016), No. 53, pp. 44–49.
[366] Palshikar, Suhas: India's Second Dominant Party System. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. LII (March 25, 2017), No. 12, pp. 12–15.

Conclusion

During the course of time, the Indian version of secularism has shifted from the Nehruvian model of equal indifference to equal respect to all religions. However, the new definition was probably even more incoherent and problematic than the original one. Although Indian society constitutes a colourful social mosaic, its strength does not lie primarily in recognition of the discrete parts of its composite culture. Given its enormous fragmentation, it is vital for the modern Indian democratic state to preserve its distinct overarching principle of collective identity. This distinct ethos in the form of Nehruvian "national philosophy" based on secular and modernist values has however disappeared after Jawaharlal Nehru's death, and the politics practised by his successors only contributed to this ideological vacuum. The problems of communal violence which emerged in the 1980s were not caused by the failure of the Nehruvian secularism, as the anti-modernists suggest, but rather by its weakening during the times of his successors. This was caused primarily by a greater mass mobilization of the lower strata of the society and decline in the Congress party's electoral gains, which was followed by a reaction in form of more populist state policies towards the weaker sections of the society. However, this promoting of diverse communitarian identities led to a fragmentation of the Indian polity, while the level of empowerment of the marginalized sections of society is debatable. As we have seen, virtually all the deviations from the secularist framework were not an intention but rather a result of *ad hoc* compromises caused by compulsion from various interest groups. The last years of the Indira Gandhi era witnessed a strong polarization of Indian society on communal lines and the surrender of the government to fundamentalist pressures. As a result of this communalization of the political process, India has completely abandoned the idea of a difference-blind notion of equal dignity and started asserting the politics of difference.

The restructuring of the Indian political system during the last years of the 1980s and first half of the 1990s created condition for further changes. Economic liberalization, demographic shift and expansion of the middle class, transfer of relative power between the corporate capitalist class and the landed elites, political assertion of hitherto marginalized groups, and regionalization and communalization of politics prepared the ground for a possibility of reshaping of the public discourse, distribution of power between the dominant social groups, and possibly even a new form of passive revolution. The Hindu nationalism in the form of Deendayal Upadhyay's integral humanism has occupied the position of the national ideology vacated by the Nehruvian secularism, and the new capitalist class as the principal exponent of this worldview asserts moral and political hegemony over the Indian civil society. Although Narendra Modi and the BJP still have to defend its mandate in the 2019 General Election, an

important question arise: has India moved from the Nehruvian democracy to the ethnic democracy endorsing economic neoliberalism and Hindu majoritarianism as the new state ideology? This question is still to be answered in the following years.

Finding the new forms of coexistence

If the deep problem of Indian secularism lies in its adoption of Western, particularly Protestant structures, the multiculturalist political outfit cannot be a real alternative to secularism: both of them draw on the same liberal framework and both of them operate in the domain of modern state.[367] Moreover, the objection that multiculturalism can potentially erode the common good in favour of minority interests is especially remarkable in case of the composite culture of India. From this point, it may even seem that India as a polity does not hold together by the recognition of group rights. Its strength derives rather from the forcibility of the argument *why* the group rights should *not* be recognized. The new vision of the collective Indian identity can be offered only by those who are able to persuade people to abandon their identities as members of particular groups in favour to the universal citizenship. From this point of view, the secular concept of state still can be seen as a more viable alternative than the Hindu majoritarianism.

Given the changes in Indian political climate, there is now a strong contention between the Nehruvian secularists and Hindu nationalists in the public discourse. However, if we want to find a solution to the contemporary crisis and find a way to refine the Indian majority–minority framework, we must first step out of the normative disjunction between political secularism and political religion. As Partha Chatterjee says, secularism is an improper ground to fight Hindu communalism.[368] If we understand it in a sense of strict separation of state and religion, it is insuitable for defence of minority groups, because once in power, the Hindu nationalists can easily exploit the state machinery to persecute the minorities. A more rigid interpretation of secularism thus cannot work to prevent religious discrimination. If we follow the second possible interpretation of secularism as neutrality, we are getting to the slippery slope of historical reality. As the Indian state has never been truly neutral in its relation to religious communities, there is no guarantee that it will remain impartial in the future.

Can this be the reason for the very redefinition of the concept of secularism, or at least its position in the public sphere? Akeel Bilgrami criticizes Nehruvian secularism for its "Archimedean" character. This assumption that secularism is placed in a neutral Archimedean

[367] For the liberal defence of group-specific rights, see especially Kymlicka, Will: *Multicultural Citizenship: a liberal theory of minority rights*. 1995.
[368] Chatterjee, Partha: Secularism and Toleration. 1994.

point, outside the arena of political commitments, led the leaders of the Congress and Nehru in particular to let secular policy emerge out of negotiation and dialogue between different communities. This assumption that Congress alone can substitute the voices of all relevant parties to the dialogue substantially undermined its moral legitimacy. There are also several critiques of the very secular idea, which is seen as too much tied to Christianity and its "political theology of the two kingdoms"[369], which is however no longer sustainable in the wake of multicultural societies with a diversity of both religious and unreligious beliefs. Is there a need to refine the very balance between freedom of conscience, and equality of respect to all kinds of believers and non-believers, as Charles Taylor remarks?[370] Is there a possible solution in institutionalizing toleration through the means of providing deliberative bodies deciding on matters of entire community to all the religious groups, as Partha Chatterjee suggests,[371] or through protection of the decision-making processes from unsecular voices and using the language which is equally accessible to all citizens, according to Habermas?[372]

Or is the return to the pre-modern forms of coexistence a feasible and viable alternative? Anti-modernists are of no help with this, as they only repeat the assumption of secularists and Hindu nationalists, replicating the orientalist framework. The only difference lies in devaluating the "modern" or "Western" and appreciating the "traditional" or "Indian". Criticizing the secularism proposed by Nehru, they are not able to afford any viable alternative except of a return to a vaguely defined tradition of tolerance as a value enshrined in the religious beliefs. The suggestion to ground the mutual coexistence in the system of shared values does not suit to India either. In fact, this is exactly what the Hindu nationalists assert, postulating the Hindu doctrine as a supposed basis for tolerance and presenting the Hindu culture as inherently secular. Moreover, while doing this, they largely reproduce the orientalist account about Hinduism as a spiritual civilization based on non-violence.

It seems to be clear that if we want to base tolerance and respect on the basis of tradition, we must not resort to the religious doctrines, but rather search for the principles of coexistence in the domain of practical knowledge and daily life and theories based on them instead of speculative theories and doctrines. We have seen that the practices of democratic politics and public reasoning are always embedded in a specific historical and cultural experience of the given society, and thus the debate on Indian secularism must reflect its context and dynamics.

[369] De Roover, Jakob: *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*. 2015, pp. 86–110
[370] Taylor, Charles: Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism. In Butler, Judith, Habermas, Jürgen, Taylor, Charles, West, Cornel: *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. pp. 34–59.
[371] Chatterjee, Partha: Secularism and Toleration. 1994, pp. 1775–1776.
[372] Habermas, Jürgen: Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 14 (2006), No. 1, pp. 6–12.

Analogically, we must take in account all the dynamics of existing practices of coexistence in account when looking for the new model. We must only put up with the fact that the ideal Archimedean point can never be reached.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AAP *Aam Aadmi Party* (Common Man's Party)

BJP *Bharatiya Janata Party* (Indian Popular Party)

BJS *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Indian People's Union)

BSP *Bahujan Samaj Party* (Majority People's Party)

OBCs Other Backward Classes

RSS *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (National Volunteers' Association)

SCs Scheduled Castes

SP *Samajwadi Party* (Socialist Party)

STs Scheduled Tribes

VHP *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council)